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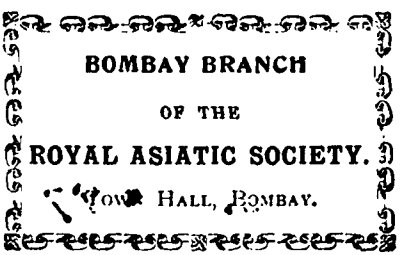

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hard brown fists and rush out into the quiet, star-sown night, to fling herself on the ground and sob until she sometimes slept through sheer exhaustion.

This had occurred more than once, and Gaspard, finding that remonstrance with the unwilling little dancer was utterly useless, at last complained to her stepfather. Big Jim Carter replied blusteringly, "You leave her to me—I'll learn her."

And on the cold, starry night—the night which was to change the whole destiny of the little orphan—her stepfather was carrying his threat into execution.

The great European War, which had echoed but faintly in that far-off distant outpost of Empire, was at an end; that much even the trappers of Lone Pine Station knew, and that night one of their number was bringing as a guest to the saloon a man who had fought all through it—a young miner from a distant city who was returning from England, having been demobilised from the army.

"A nice thing if a chap that's been a-fightin' can't 'ave a bit of a do got up for 'im! If yer ain't in the saloon sharp at eight there'll be another 'iding waiting for yer, see?"

And with an oath, Big Jim Carter swung himself out of the shanty, and Molly shuddered as she heard his steps crunching on the cold, hard snow outside the door.

For a long while she crouched in aching, defeated silence in her corner, and the log fire threw little jets of blue flame into the room,

which shone on her pallid, tear-stained face, and lit up her angry young eyes.

"One day I'll kill him!" she burst out, when at length she rose from her corner and commenced to get ready for her hateful work at the saloon.

CHAPTER II

THE bar of Gaspard's saloon was crowded with men—old, young, middle-aged, all with strong-smelling drinks before them, all talking at once about the same thing—the price that they had secured for their skins—and nobody noticed Molly as she stood for a moment in the doorway, surveying the occupants of the bar with a little cold, sick smile on her lips.

A gaudy red scarf that she had thrown over her head had slipped back and made a hood, which contrasted vividly with the black hair which fell, in wavy masses, to the slender waist.

The little oval face was chalk-white, but the red lips looked like the newly opened bud of some crimson flower; while the large grey eyes looked grave far beyond Molly's years.

A few of the trappers had brought their wives, at the urgent request of those wise ladies, who were thus enabled to combine pleasure with the duty of seeing that not all the money went into Jacques Gaspard's greasy pocket, and it was one of these women who first noticed Molly and announced, "Here's the dancing girl."

At her words a young man turned his eyes towards the door, and for a few seconds they held those of the young girl who was standing there, making such a wondrously fair picture

against the background of the forest and the starlit night.

The young man who had looked was the honoured guest of the evening—the man who had fought in the greatest battles that the world had known, and he was telling the group around him something of the war at first hand. All were hanging eagerly upon his words, when he suddenly stopped, his gaze riveted upon the door.

"Who—who is that?" he asked abruptly, breaking off in the middle of a sentence.

A dozen pairs of eyes fastened upon the little figure with the long hair and red hood which was now disappearing into the bar parlour, and a careless voice explained that it was "Carter's kid."

"Comes to do a bit of a jig and sing a song sometimes," volunteered another, in further explanation of Molly's presence.

But Jack Lorimer hardly heard what the rough, bearded trappers were saying.

A moment ago he had been re-living the battles of La Bassée, Loos, Bullecourt, and St. Quentin. and he had enjoyed the rapt attention of these husky, hardened sons of the wild; but all enjoyment of his novel position, all pride in the mighty fact that the Motherland had brought the German brutes to heel, was wiped out by the sight of that little, lovely, suffering face—the face that had shone like a star in the doorway for just one second.

The young miner who had heard the call to arms over so many thousands of miles could not remember feeling like this before.

Until he had journeyed to Europe at the age of twenty-three women had not counted for much in his life. He had been left an orphan at fourteen, when he had gone to work in the mines, roughing it so far as lodgings were concerned with a dozen other young fellows—all eager, light-hearted, heavy-handed youths, who knew how to fight, and laugh, and make the most of life.

The women of Britain and the women of France had inspired him with a high and lofty ideal of womanhood's worth, and more than once he had experienced wistful longings when he had seen a mate fall in love with and marry a girl—a sweet, wholesome British girl who would come over and make a home for her man when the war was at an end.

"But a mining camp is no place for a woman," Jack Lorimer told himself; but there was something else besides which his white, honest, fierce, young nature told him had not yet come to him. He was too shy to admit, even to himself, that it was love which was lacking when he decided that he could not follow his mate's example and ask one of those clear-skinned, fair young girls to come back to Canada with him as his bride.

Jack Lorimer was as clean and fine a specimen of young manhood as Canada could produce. Like most men of great moral as well as physical strength, he was almost primitively simple, and in his heart were depths of tenderness for all things small and weak that had never yet been sounded by any human being.

Although the young miner went on talking in

his quiet, simple way, his mind was with the little grey-eyed girl who had disappeared from sight into the bar parlour.

Somehow, she didn't look the type of girl to enjoy entertaining an assembly such as this.

Jack Lorimer looked around him.

On the rough deal benches which ran three-parts round the saloon were seated some twenty hard-featured, rough-speaking miners and trappers, with a sprinkling of a dozen or so coarse-featured women.

All had drinks set before them on the tresselled planks which served as tables; nearly all of them, women as well as men, were smoking, and presently all laughed loudly at a joke which made the hot blood mount to the young miner's forehead; not for himself, for he knew life as these men and women lived it, but for the grave-eyed young girl, standing in the door of the bar parlour, who must have heard it, although she gave no sign of having done so.

Molly's appearance in the saloon had been the signal for the bar-tender to sprinkle a pailful of sand on a space of the flooring which had been cleaned for her performance.

A daughter of Jacques Gaspard, who had recently come home from a city school, where she had acquired, amongst other things, an extremely rudimentary knowledge of the piano, entered the room, and with many smirks and giggles set herself down to play the accompaniment to Molly's dance.

Conversation ceased as the piano struck up, and Molly, attired in an old Spanish costume

which Gaspard had had altered to fit her, danced her way into the midst of the circle of hardened, eager faces.

There was not a smile on the chalk-white little face—for nothing could induce Molly to smear her cheeks with paint and powder—as the young girl raised aloft the tambourine which she held and went through the pretty, graceful dances which she had made up herself on days when she had felt so glad and joyous that to dance was the only thing left to her.

"Snakes, but that kid's some goer!"

"Let's have another, good and plenty full of kicks!"

"Show us how you kin throw yer legs!"

These were some of the remarks that greeted the end of Molly's performance.

Although Jack Lorimer had watched her more closely, perhaps, than any of the others, the great, tearing ache at his heart, the intensity of his pity, prevented him from feeling anything even remotely akin to enjoyment. Several times he told himself that he was a fool.

"The girl is probably enjoying herself, and even if she isn't, it's her living, I suppose," he argued, and he tried to keep his eyes from wandering to the corner into which Molly had retired—shrunk, would be a better word—in order to rest for a few minutes.

Molly was still smarting, inwardly and outwardly, from the effects of the cruel thrashing that she had received. None of those who had witnessed her dance suspected the pain that had racked her at every step.

Her father was not yet come ; when he arrived, he would see that the saloon-keeper got his money's worth from her—and usually it all went back into his till for whisky before the end of the evening.

"Ask Carter's kid to give us a bit of a song," said one of the audience, between pulls at his glass and puffs at his pipe.

Molly got up wearily.

Again the pity which he was powerless to account for, and equally powerless to stem, surged over Jack Lorimer like a mighty tide. His heart ached for this little, lonely, tender slip of girlhood, and he felt as if he wanted to shield her from all these brutish, unfeeling men and women, with his own almost limitless strength.

A whispered conversation with Gaspard's giggling girl revealed the fact that she did not know the song which Molly wanted to sing, so, after striking a few wrong notes in an ineffectual attempt at an accompaniment, the saloon-keeper's daughter joined a group of the young men, which included Jack Lorimer ; and, because he was by far the best-looking man there, did her best to strike up a flirtation.

But the young miner was oblivious to her attempts ; all his attention was focussed upon Molly who, with hands clasped loosely in front of her, commenced to sing the hauntingly sweet song which must surely have been written by an exile from the land of mists and heather :

"Ah, but I'm longing for my ain folk,
Though they be but humble, puir and plain folk."

There was a note of heart-breaking wistfulness in Molly's voice to-night.

Somebody had opened the door of the saloon, because the atmosphere of the low-ceilinged room had become almost overpoweringly close with the fumes of alcohol and tobacco smoke.

Through the open doorway Molly could see the snow on the trail and the white, feathery pine tufts shaking in the air. The young girl hated the cruelly cold northland, and just dimly she could remember the expression of her mother's face whenever she sang that song.

"I hate Lone Pine Station, and I hate my step-father—hate him—hate him—hate him!"

The words kept chanting themselves in her brain like a horrible refrain, and yet her lips sung the words of the song correctly.

At the finish a round of boisterous applause greeted her, and then somebody proposed poker; a pack of cards was produced, and the players grouped themselves around the largest of the deal tables.

Molly was forgotten by the majority for the time being.

But, seated in the midst of a group of players, Jack Lorimer never took his eyes off the little wistful face which sometimes relaxed into a smile that held nothing of mirth.

Some of the fellows, preferring not to play, had lounged over to the corner where Molly and the Gaspard girl were sitting, and the latter was sustaining the entire conversation, a thing she was capable of doing in her own fashion, for an almost unlimited time.

Although, at that moment, a few words with the little grey-eyed dancer seemed the most desirable thing on earth, yet something for which he had no name, for which he could find no possible explanation, kept him back, and he had to be content to watch ; but somehow the watching made him sad.

Suddenly a blood-red mist blinded his eyes, and every pulse in his great muscular body throbbed and hammered and shouted for the life of the hulking, bearded, half-drunken trapper who, without a moment's warning, seized Molly round the waist, and pressing back her little dark head with one huge dirty hand, kissed her full on the lips, over and over again.

There was a hoarse yell, and wholesale smashing of glasses as Jack Lorimer bounded over the table in one mad leap, stepping on the hand of one man, and kicking the face of another in his flight.

" What's wrong ? "

" Gone stark, raving mad, I reckon."

The two men who had suffered grumblingly muttered these remarks, but the rest, with the keen scent of wolves on the prowl for a fight, left their cards at once and surged in a body towards the corner where their guest was already hammering at the head of Sam the Skunk, so-called because of his success in trapping that particular animal, and not because he was in any way wanting in physical courage.

Gaspard's daughter was uttering little affected screams ; but Molly, whiter than ever, was standing motionless as a statue, every nerve of

her young body thrilling to the stranger who was the first protector that she had ever known.

Sam the Skunk was the most persistent and the most hateful of all the men in his attentions to her.

He was the acknowledged leader in every fight, the hardest drinker, and the finest trapper in Lone Pine Station.

"Don't—ah, leave him alone! He'll—he'll kill you!"

The words were forced from Molly's pallid lips as she saw the head of the handsome young stranger caught beneath the long, hairy arm of the trapper, and again and again she saw the huge fist crash into the face of her champion.

The saloon now formed itself into sides. Most of the men were secretly on the side of the stranger, but it would not be politic to openly confess their feelings, for whereas, after he had taken his thrashing, the stranger would depart, Sam the Skunk would remain with them—and Sam was a power in Lone Pine Station.

The crowd pressed back so as to leave a clear space for the fight, and the portion of the floor which had been sanded for Molly's dance now became the combatant's ring.

The fight was forcibly stopped for a few minutes in order to give both men time to strip.

Once Molly darted forward and plucked at Jack Lorimer's sleeve.

"Don't fight him, please. He's a big brute, and he'll nearly kill you," she pleaded, with her beautiful eyes upraised to his.

The young miner stared dazedly at her; it is doubtful if he even heard her.

But the big, bearded trapper, who was at least five years older and two stone heavier than his opponent, caught up Molly's words and echoed them, with the swaggering bravado of the man who is certain of victory.

"You hear what the girl says? Do you want to be killed, youngster?"

The young ex-soldier's reply drew forth low murmurs and whistles of admiration from the crowd.

"I heard what she said. I'm not particularly anxious to be killed, and anyway, you won't do it. Come on!" And with these words Jack Lorimer sparred up to his unequally matched foe.

In the most widely diversified army that history has ever known, the young Canadian soldier had learned almost everything that his ex-pugilistic comrades, many of them champions of the ring, could teach him.

The fight swayed first one way and then another, but in the end science triumphed over brute strength and superiority in weight, and Sam the Skunk lay, broken and winded, on the sanded floor in a pool of his own blood, while his young opponent stood, calm-eyed and fiercely determined over him.

"Want any more?" he demanded curtly.

"Gee! But that was sure a bully fight. Nobody in Lone Pine Station has ever had Sam the Skunk beat yet. The fight's yours, stranger. What'll you have?" and the crowd pressed

around Jack Lorimer inviting him to drink at their expense, leaving the defeated Sam to his seconds, who were busy washing his wounds.

They had long ago forgotten what the fight was about; but the young ex-soldier had not.

Declining all offers of refreshment with a few curt words, Jack Lorimer put on his coat and left the saloon, binding his handkerchief around a broken wrist as he went.

In the general confusion which followed Molly, too, slipped out, her young heart on fire with pride, for right down the ages women have gloried in the men who will fight for their sakes.

It was a novelty for "Carter's kid" to have something to thank anyone for, and now, with all her eager throbbing little heart in her eyes and voice and manner, Molly stopped Jack Lorimer when he had gone a few paces down the trail and, laying one hand on his arm, said half-timidly, "I'm Molly—Molly Osborne. You—you've hurt yourself very badly, I'm afraid; but oh! it was dandy to see you tackle that great big bully. He'll not boss Lone Pine Station any more. Say"—and the sentence, which was spoken with the sweet artlessness of a child, was absolutely devoid of all attempt to flatter—"you are a very brave man, aren't you? You are surely the bravest man in the world."

All Jack Lorimer's strong, passionate young manhood rose up and went out to this little white slip of a girl who looked almost a child standing there in the Spanish dancer's dress which was so strangely out of keeping with her wild surroundings.

He extended his hand—the left one; the right hung useless by his side.

"I'm not any braver than other men, Missy. I—I sure just had to land out at that great big husky who—who——" His lips would not utter the word "kissed," for somehow that seemed a profanation of a something that had suddenly become very sweet and sacred. So he substituted "insulted," and added simply, "It made me mad, somehow."

He looked so fine standing there in the cold light of the moon, beneath the star-pierced sky, with the wind ruffling his thick brown hair into little waves.

But suddenly Molly caught sight of the useless right hand—the hand that had been rendered useless for her sake.

"Poor hand! If you come along to our shanty, I'll bind it up for you," she said, in a pitying voice.

Molly's whole attention was taken up with her champion's wounds, and even if this had not been so, she would have remained ignorant of the sudden fire which lit up Jack Lorimer's eyes and which ran, lava-hot, all through him.

Hitherto, Molly had only known cruelty from one man and indifference from all, and that anybody should stand up to the best fighter in Lone Pine Station on her behalf was nothing less than a miracle.

She did not know that Love, the master-magician that invests even the poorest life with glamour, had come to her and to her brave young champion that night, and that, though

the path which led to its happy fulfilment was steep and thorny, yet the gold of true romance was only waiting its appointed time before it poured itself, with reckless prodigality, into her young life.

"Thank you, missy. If I could get some hot water and a clean rag or two, I guess these little scratches could easily be fixed up," replied Jack Lorimer, conventionally enough, but with the consciousness that, after to-night, things would never again seem the same to him.

CHAPTER III

THE young couple walked silently down the snow-covered trail towards the miserable little shack which was all the home that Molly knew.

The sound of a pack of hungry wolves, whining low and piteously, in the distance, was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Jack Lorimer stole a side glance at the fair, serious face of his little companion.

As they brushed through the undergrowth which formed a short cut to the shack, a thought and a vision which mentally took the young miner's breath away came to him.

Most of his leave from France had been spent in London, and many society women had taken upon themselves to see that the homeless boys from overseas were not neglected in the matter of individual hospitality.

Jack Lorimer had never, even in his most imaginative moments, dreamed that there were such beautiful homes and so many lovely women as he had seen in the world's greatest, most cosmopolitan city.

A sudden vision of the grey-eyed, sweet-faced girl at his side in a home such as he had seen—a home which would be his as well, and which he would buy for her—came to him, and the grim

cold forest, with its snow-covered, eternally whispering pines, and lack of civilization, faded away; he saw the shining lights of London, and flower-decked, silver-laden tables; he heard men's voices discussing things of which he knew nothing, and women's light, happy laughter.

"We are here," said Molly, in her soft little voice, and Jack Lorimer woke from his pleasant dream to enter the log hut which was so cruel a contrast to his imaginary home that he stifled an unwonted sigh.

"Please sit over here, by the fire, and I'll soon get some hot water," said Molly, drawing forward a rude imitation of an arm-chair, made out of a packing case and a few logs.

Jack Lorimer sat down and feasted his eyes on the grace of Molly's supplë little form as she moved quietly and quickly about the room, setting a big iron kettle on the blazing fire, and feeling ashamed of the limited resources of her poor home.

"I'll just get out of this trick costume if you'll excuse me a minute," she said, when, having done all she could in the way of preparation, she was obliged to wait until the water was sufficiently heated.

Molly disappeared into the inner room, and for the first time in her barren, loveless little life, she paused longer than she need have done in front of the aged, cracked bit of looking-glass over the upturned box which served for her dressing-table.

Whether she was pretty or ugly had certainly never before occurred to Molly, and in pressing

close to her unflattering reflection, she did not allow for the deficiencies of the glass as a mirror.

"How nice it would be to have lovely eyes and a straight, long nose—not a silly little thing like . . ."

Molly could not find a suitable simile for her charming little nose, so she broke off and fell to considering her wonderful mane of glossy hair as she brushed it out.

"It isn't so bad for length, but I wish it were golden," she sighed, with the usual dissatisfaction of the dark-haired.

In her Spanish dancer's dress, Molly had looked like a little picture come to life. In the skimpy grey skirt and woollen jersey that formed her usual attire, she looked more ordinary, but somehow she seemed to come nearer to the young man who was eagerly watching for her reappearance.

"Oh, don't lift that big heavy kettle! Let me do it," cried Molly, dashing forward with a deliciously maternal little air, as if the big, strapping young miner had been a small child heedlessly rushing into danger.

Jack Lorimer laughed—a full, deep-throated, healthy laugh that was good to hear.

"Both hands aren't hurt, missy. It sure is a man's job lifting things like this." And as she spoke, he swung the huge iron kettle easily off the fire with his left hand—a feat which Molly had to perform slowly and with two hands—and poured some of the water into the wash basin on the rough pine table.

"P'raps if you wouldn't mind bathing it for

me," he suggested, with the faintest suspicion of a twinkle in his blue eyes.

Molly made a delightful picture as she carefully took the injured wrist in her own small, cool fingers, and, bending her serious little face well over it, trickled the hot water over the place until it got almost cold, and the young man asked for more hot water to be added.

He prolonged the operation until even Molly —ignorant as she was—thought that it had been bathed long enough; then came the business of binding it up. Some plaster was found for the cuts and bruises that disfigured the handsome young face, and Jack Lorimer thought that a dozen fights would be worth the while—though he was aching all over as the result of Sam the Skunk's attentions—if only those tiny fingers would touch the bruises and bind up the wounds.

They made a splendid young couple as they sat on either side by the blazing log fire, with a cup of cocoa and half a loaf on a small table between them.

Under the stimulus of youthful, kindly companionship, Molly expanded like a flower in the sun.

Often she smiled, and now and again her laugh, merry and bubbling with mirth like a child's, rang out on the awful stillness of the forest like sweet music.

It startled Big Jim Carter, who was coming slowly up the trail, more than half drunk, and his step quickened as he neared the shack, while an aggressive expression crept into his sullen, lustreless eyes. He hated the sound of his stepchild's laughter.

When he stood in the open doorway, his form bulking largely in the white light of the moon and saw Molly sitting by the fire, apparently enjoying herself hugely with the young stranger, his lips curled into a snarl.

"Nice goings on when yer lawful guardian's away earning yer bread, ain't it?" he said, in the thick voice of the man who has taken too much to drink.

Jack Lorimer stood up, feeling confused and awkward. Dimly he realised that possibly he had taken an unfair advantage of Molly's kindness. Instead of lingering after his wrist had been dressed he should have left at once. He was, of course, unaware of Big Jim Carter's relationship to Molly, and imagined him to be her father.

He spoke in a straightforward, manly way that would have won immediate favour with any man other than the cowardly, hulking bully who spent his spare time in ill-using a slip of a girl.

"I've not come to Lone Pine Station a-purpose to see your daughter, Mr. Osborne," he began, in explanation of his presence.

Big Jim Carter interrupted him with a bellowing roar.

"Osborne be danged! I ain't called Osborne —I'm Jim Carter—Big Jim Carter they call me hereabouts," and Molly's stepfather, who was secretly a little proud of the adjective before his name, flung out the information loudly.

Jack Lorimer looked a little uncertainly from one to the other. A frown creased the smoothness of his young forehead.

"He's my stepfather," volunteered Molly in a low voice, choked with shame.

Suddenly, the young miner felt towards her as he had done in the whisky saloon. An overmastering pity surged into his soul for the little maid whom he had championed that night. But he was unable to find words in which to express his emotions.

"Oh, I see," he said, somewhat lamely, in response to Molly's information.

"Well, I'm glad yer do see, stranger. I'll also see that yer don't get a-hangin' round Lone Pine Station—least, not after my stepdaughter," he blustered.

Jack Lorimer flushed as he picked up his hat.

"I'm only passing through here. I come from Stormpoint City, three hundred miles off." He turned towards Molly, who was standing with her back against the wooden wall, her little dark head flung back, her small fists clenched, and her bosom heaving beneath the rough woollen jersey that she wore.

"I hate him! I hate him—hate him!" The horrible chant was repeating itself once again in her brain, but with an insistence which was rendered a thousand times more intense by the presence of this kindly, big-hearted stranger.

"Come back, you. Get my supper ready," Big Jim Carter said roughly, thrusting out a hand to catch Molly by her long mane of hair—a thing which he often did when he was half-drunk, as at present.

But something deeper than mere anger and resentment flamed suddenly in Molly's young,

passionate soul. It was the primitive instinct of woman to seek the protection of the man she loves which gave Molly courage to defy her step-father.

" I'll not get your supper until I've seen Mr. Lorimer to the head of the trail," and with these words, Molly marched out after her guest, with head erect and eyes flashing the defiance that she felt.

Down the little path through the clearing, the young couple went, and when the fires which were always kept burning on winter nights to prevent wolves from coming too near were reached, Molly turned and held out her hand.

In the red glow of the fire, Jack Lorimer could see something bright sparkling in the big grey eyes—something which stirred his manhood to its very depths and made him long to crush the little form to him in a wild, mad, passionate embrace.

Quite unconscious of the fire which she was kindling in the breast of the man who had fought for her that night, Molly thanked him with the simplicity of a child for all that he had done.

There was no coquetry in her manner, no trick of lash or lid in the steady gaze of her eyes as she said, " I don't like saying ' good-bye ' to the only one who has ever taken my part since mother died. I—I suppose you won't ever be coming to Lone Pine Station again, Mr. Lorimer ? "

A sudden overwhelming longing to stay in Lone Pine Station assailed the young miner, but he crushed down the feeling, told himself that, penniless as he was, he could do Molly no good

by staying, and instead he replied, "Maybe I won't be coming to Lone Pine Station any more, Miss Molly. But here's my address," and as he spoke, he tore a leaf out of his pocket-book and hastily scribbled something.

"If you ever want a friend, a line to this address will find me. Good-bye, missy, and—and God bless you," he finished huskily, giving Molly the first blessing that she had known since the little mother who had loved her was laid to rest in the forest nearly five years ago.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Richard Earle, at twenty-eight years of age, had been sentenced to seven years' penal servitude for a particularly mean series of frauds, he had found some solace for his lonely hours in the prison cell in recalling, and setting down, incident by incident, everything that he could remember of his former life as a solicitor's clerk.

When his tin plate was rubbed bright and clean, Richard Earle often looked appreciatively at his reflected image, for his vanity was overweening, and it was this, together with his undoubted charm and good looks, that was partly to blame for his downfall.

The only son of respectable tradespeople, Dicky Earle, as he was known to his intimates, plunged into the wildest excesses at a very early age. It was not long before his broken-hearted parents died, leaving the spoiled, heartless, unscrupulous youth to go headlong down the road which often leads to worse goals than a prison cell.

Like many another criminal, Dick Earle found it by no means easy to live when at last he was free from prison.

So when he got the chance he jumped at the offer and sailed for the Yukon as the valet of a famous big-game shooter.

His employer, however, caught him at some of his old tricks, and regretted his momentary weakness in giving the job to an ex-convict in order to give him another chance, rather than to an excellent, worthy fellow, with the highest credentials, who had applied.

The upshot of the incident was that Dick Earle found himself once more out of work, but in a strange, wild land where men were ruled more by their own desires and the ability to enforce them than by the laws made in cities and Houses of Parliament.

Nobody quite knew how he had come to Lone Pine Station, but he was able to sing a good song, tell a good story, and apparently he had plenty of money to spend on drink and cards.

Until his employer went over his possessions very carefully, he did not know how great had been the extent of his ex-valet's thefts, and when eventually he found out, it was too late to catch him.

One evening, about a week after Jack Lorimer's visit to the shack, Molly was surprised to see her father enter with a stranger who was quite as handsome, in a different way, as the man whose last words, " Good-bye and God bless you," had been ringing in her ears ever since his fine, athletic form had disappeared down the trail in the darkness.

" Get us a meal, girl, as quick as you kin. This is Mr. Earle, a stranger to Lone Pine, and I want to show him that Big Jim Carter kin be as flash as others when he's a mind."

He had succeeded in winning a fair sum at cards from the stranger, and he could afford the spread of canned goods, washed down by whisky, that he had brought in with him.

As Molly moved about the room, with her customary grace and lightness, Dick Earle's eyes never left her.

He had always been a good judge of a pretty face, and Molly was something more than merely pretty. Even in London, in the height of his prosperity, where his women friends had every help from their dress and surroundings, he had never seen so exquisitely moving and beautiful a face. And, further than that, Molly reminded him faintly of somebody that he must at one time, have known!

When they all sat down to the meal, Dick Earle studied every feature of the little white face with its black lashed, dark grey eyes.

All at once, with the brilliance of a meteor flashing across the sky, he recalled where he had seen a face like Molly's.

In his wild, graceless days, he had gained the friendship of a kindly, sweet-natured woman named Mary Wrenford, who kept house for a brother who was reputed to be nearly a millionaire.

"It may help the boy to keep straight," was the reason given for the frequent invitations to the house.

Because she thought that it might do him a little good with his employers, Mary got her brother to put some of his business into their hands. Then suddenly she disappeared—eloped

with a penniless actor—and he never saw her again.

But six years later—the year before he was found out and sent to prison—he remembered Mark Wrenford coming into the office a broken, heart-sick man, with less than a year to live.

"I've lost sight of Mary these five years. I believe she went to Canada with her husband, but I'm not sure. Anyway, they've got a youngster—girl, I think—and I want you to get busy on the job of finding all three. I'd give six months out of the twelve I've got to live if I could die with my hand in Mary's," he said, with tears in the eyes that were always so hard.

A hundred thousand pounds was left to Mary and her husband if still alive, and if dead to their child if she could be found. If she were not found within ten years, the money was to be used in founding a Children's Convalescent Home, to be named "The Mary Wrenford Home."

To the ordinary mind, it would seem absolutely impossible for the exhaustive advertising campaign which the solicitors organised to be unproductive of any result, if any member of the family still lived; but here, in the lonely, snow-bound wild, it would have been surprising if the campaign had succeeded.

"Molly is your stepchild, is she not, Carter?" said Dick Earle, with the easy familiarity of the man who condescends to a social inferior.

"That's so," answered Big Jim, reflectively.

Molly had gone to bed some time ago, and

now lay sleeping soundly in her bare little apartment.

"Was her mother's maiden name Wrenford, by any chance?" asked Dick Earle, and he waited breathlessly for the answer.

"Couldn't say—don't remember. It was Osborne when I married her. I kin soon tell yer, though," and without a moment's hesitation, Big Jim blundered to his feet and clumped heavily into Molly's room, returning a few minutes later with a little black oblong box.

"This was my wife—a damned pretty woman too, but soft—soft," repeated Big Jim, in a husky, drunken whisper.

He was well drunk, or he would have quickly resented the stranger's impertinence in prying into his affairs. He held out a little faded portrait, taken in a London studio many years ago.

With trembling fingers Dick Earle seized it and held it beneath the yellow light of the rude oil lamp upon the wall.

Then a tremor shook his whole body, and his brain swam in a frenzied endeavour to grasp the strangeness of the whole thing.

Here, in this rude northland shack, was a young girl worth a hundred thousand pounds, but she would never know it unless he chose to tell her!

The sweet, dainty features of the woman whom he had known in the old days, as a mere boy, looked pleadingly up at him, as if begging him not to harm her child.

He cast a quick look at Big Jim Carter. He was half asleep over the fire, so he could easily examine the contents of the little black box.

He impatiently tossed aside the little faded love tokens—a piece of blue ribbon, a bunch of faded roses, some pressed wild flowers, and a baby's sock and shoe—and with eager, trembling fingers unfolded a packet of papers which were tied together.

Yes, they established Molly's identity as the dead man's niece beyond all doubt. Her mother's marriage certificate, a little snapshot photograph of herself and her brother in the days before her marriage, and a few of his letters, written when business or pleasure had called him away to other countries.

"A hundred thousand pounds!"

Dick Earle repeated the words over and over again as he sat, with his head in his hands, gazing into the log fire, seeing pictures in the red heart of it which fired his ready imagination almost to madness.

All night long he sat there, while Big Jim Carter snored in his chair by the dead fire, making and rejecting one plan after another.

"One thing is certain, and that is that I must gain the girl's friendship and that of her stepfather, too," he told himself, thoughtfully.

Nobody knew better than Dick Earle how to carry out such a project. He accompanied Big Jim when he chose to put in a day's work at the stores, plying him with drink, and purposely losing money to him in cards.

In the evenings, he escorted Molly home from her work at the saloon and taught her many new songs, which he first of all sang to her in his light, fascinating tenor voice.

When he felt that the time was ripe to ask such a question, he put it to Molly's stepfather.

"You'll be losing that pretty little girl of yours some fine day. She'll be getting married before you know where you are," he said, lightly, but a close observer would have detected a strained note in his voice.

Molly, by her work at the saloon, was responsible for far more whisky than her stepfather cared to lose, and he answered with an oath, "The man that comes foolin' around that stepkid o' mine 'ull git 'is nose smashed clean in."

He spoke with so much ferocious earnestness and looked so huge and forbidding, that Dick Earle felt his heart sink. His task was going to be harder than he anticipated.

While he was thinking, an idea suddenly occurred to Big Jim—an idea which caused his ferrety eyes to gleam with hopeful anticipation. He leaned forward, ingratiatingly.

"Say, Mr. Earle, you're a toff, I reckon—got plenty o' dough, an' I dessay a nice 'ouse away in England, all yer own?"

"Oh, yes, of course," replied the ex-convict airily, wondering what the trapper was driving at.

Big Jim Carter sucked his pipe meditatively.

"Course there's a sight o' young fellers after my Moll, as yer kin judge, from the looks o' the gal," he continued.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," agreed his listener, eagerly.

Big Jim came a little closer, and spoke confidingly.

"Maybe you got a notion o' young Molly yourself, eh?" he said, with a leer.

Without giving the ex-convict time to answer, he went on quickly, "If you are, yer kin buy yer chance fer——" He paused, as if fixing the figure in his mind. "A 'undred pounds," he finished, slyly.

Dick Earle's pulses bounded. The man was helping him out beautifully. But he was not going to part with a penny on mere speculation.

"As you surmise, I am in love with your stepdaughter, and, with your consent, I'll marry her in the nearest township, and take her back to England with me. But I prefer not to buy my chances in an affair like this. I'll enter the ranks with Molly's other suitors, as a man should. But," and he paused a moment in order to give his next words weight, "I'll pay you fifty pounds, if you'll speak a word in my favour to Molly, on the day that I get her promise to marry me."

Big Jim Carter closed with the offer at once.

"She'll be only too glad to go to England with you," he said, and there was a world of hidden meaning in his voice as he spoke.

That night Molly had one of the worst thrashings that her stepfather had ever given her. He had got madly drunk in anticipation of the money which Dick Earle was to pay him.

The next morning brought Dick Earle to the shack as a visitor.

He looked so strong, so manly and handsome, with the early morning sun shining on the face that had gained a certain ruggedness during prison life.

Molly was tired and wretched, and felt ill. Her eyelids were swollen with tears, and her heart was sick with longing to escape from the brute who filled her young life with hopeless misery.

"What is the matter with my little Molly to-day? My bright singing-bird looks ill and—forgive me—unhappy, also. Can't you tell me about it? I may be able to help you," and as he spoke, Dick Earle took a step towards the little drooping figure and laid a kindly hand on Molly's shoulder.

Suddenly, without a second's warning, Molly burst out into an uncontrollable fit of hysterical sobbing.

Dick Earle took her into his arms as a kindly elder brother might have done, and in time succeeded in calming her.

"Now, tell me what is the matter, little one," he said, his arm still pressing her closely.

"It's—it's my stepfather. Oh, I hate him—hate him!" repeated Molly fiercely.

Dick Earle saw his chance and he took it, promptly and unhesitatingly.

Pressing the little sore, bruised body still closer to his side, he whispered, "Then why not leave him, sweet one? Why not leave him and come away to England with me? I love you, Molly, little child of the north, and I want you for my wife!"

Molly's little form relaxed in the arms of the man who held her so tightly and who made love to her with the assured ease and polish of the practised expert.

Something seemed to spring to life within the untried, innocent heart of the young girl—something big and fine, and infinitely sweet.

Molly's father had been an actor—a splendid actor, too; but, with his strength of character and fine ideals, the English stage, with its endless tricks and traps, soon sickened him so that he cleared right out of the country, to take up life in a land where influence counted for very little.

But his romantic, hero-worshipping nature had descended to his child, and Molly saw in the facile, handsome ex-convict a gallant lover and knight of old romance—she could not detect the false from the real in his mock, passionate love-making. So her poor, bruised little body nestled with the confidence of a child in the strong arms of the man who held her, and her dark grey eyes, bright with happy tears, looked into Richard Earle's face with such fervent gratitude that a momentary feeling of shame came to the man who was planning to marry and then rob her of her inheritance.

"Oh, you are good—you are a wonderful, splendid man! And shall I really, really go away from here and live in England, the land where mother was born?" she asked, in a tremulous little whisper.

Dick Earle's arm tightened about Molly's shoulders. He tilted up her little soft round chin so that the pure innocent beauty of her face was wholly revealed.

But purity and innocence did not greatly appeal to the ex-convict. The bold, dashing, powdered damsels of big cities were more to his taste.

Molly, to him, was about as uninteresting as a baby to one who dislikes children.

"Insipid little fool! I'll have to give her the slip after I've got the cash. Good heavens! Fancy spending one's life with it!" and thoughts such as these were running through his mind even while he was kissing Molly and assuring her that he had loved her from the very commencement.

"When I came in from the white, cold, lonely trail, along with your stepfather, and saw your sweet face shining like a star in the shadows, I knew that Love—the love that I had dreamed about for so many long, weary years—had come at last. Ah! Molly, child, Love cares nought for riches, or poverty, or power, when it is real," he said fervently, inwardly laughing at Molly's rapt, almost reverent expression.

A great sob, which seemed torn from the young girl's very heart, escaped her sweetly curved, sensitive lips.

"What is it, beloved? Surely, surely there is nothing to cry about now," protested the arch-hypocrite who was making love to the girl who was still almost a child.

Molly slipped her little cold hand into her lover's.

"It—it wasn't that I was sorry! Oh, no—I'm glad—glad—glad!"

Her voice rose and rose until it rang loudly and triumphantly through the log cabin, and floated out on to the still air of the morning, startling a flock of kildeer into noisy flight.

"Then what was it, dear?" persisted Dick Earle.

"I—I was thinking of my mother. She died here, you know, in this hut, and—and I believe she is near us now, rejoicing because I have found somebody to love me at last. I don't believe that people die when they leave the earth, do you? They only go away for a time, but they suffer with us, and keep on loving us right till the very end. If I hadn't believed that, when stepfather has been beating me sometimes—I—I should have thrown myself into the river."

"Then I shouldn't have had you, little silly," responded her lover, lightly, in no way touched by the sweet, tender confession of Molly's faith —a faith which millions of rich learned men and women would give much to truly hold.

"No, you wouldn't," admitted Molly, with a quaint, sage little nod.

There was a long, unbroken silence in the rude log hut in the heart of the wilds; but, in vastly different ways, it was being filled, mentally, by both the occupants.

Seeing that he had had such an easy victory, Dick Earle was regretting that he had not knocked Big Jim Carter down to twenty-five pounds for his permission to marry Molly; but the unstained, trusting soul of the young girl was being lifted in a silent prayer of thanks for the gift of such a splendid man's love.

"Oh, I will try to be a good wife to him! I will work so hard to learn everything so that he will not be ashamed of me. And when we are married, there will be nothing in our lives but love," thought poor little, innocent Molly, who knew no world outside Lone Pine Station.

Presently she said, rather timidly, " And when will we go to England to be married ? "

With a smile at her ignorance of the world's code of rules, her lover answered, " We will have to be married before we sail for England, child. As soon as your stepfather comes in I will tell him of my proposal, and to-morrow we will go to the nearest town where there is a church and get married. How'll you like that, eh ? "

Molly, whose heart was throbbing and singing in a very ecstasy of joy at the prospect of leaving her hated surroundings and her still more hateful stepfather, answered with shining eyes and a little break in her soft voice, " Oh, Mr. Earle, I can't tell you how I feel about it all ! I—I could worship you," and seizing one of his hands in an impulse of wild, half-mad joy, she pressed it to her young lips and covered it with kisses.

There were some things that even Dick Earle was not proof against.

" Don't do that, kiddie," he said, huskily, drawing his hand away as if Molly had bitten, instead of kissed it. " And cut that out about worshipping, for no man breathing is worth it," he added, with a heightened colour.

" *You* are," said Molly staunchly, yet feeling a little rebuffed by her lover's tone and hasty withdrawal of his hand.

Her blind hero-worship was interrupted by the appearance in the doorway of her stepfather.

Big Jim Carter came in with a cunning smile on his dissipated, bloated face. He had overheard most of the conversation by the simple expedient of crouching beneath the window

which had a broken pane—the result of a recent drunken home-coming.

"Hallo! What are you up to along with my gel, my bold bucko?"

Molly, who had been dreading the interview with her stepfather, looked up surprised! Never had she heard him speak in so cordial a tone. In spite of his frequent assertions to the contrary, she knew that she was extremely useful to him in cooking his meals, keeping the miserable little shack in order, and in mending his clothes, helping him to clean his skins, and in hundreds of other ways she knew that she would be missed.

Her unspoken fear had been that her stepfather would oppose her going, and if he chose to enlist the sympathy of the other men, she knew that Dick Earle would be prevented, by sheer physical force, from taking her away.

Dick Earle rose, and the morning sunshine flooding the room, outlined his six feet of handsome manhood in gold against the dark pine wall.

Every fibre in Molly's eager, trembling little body thrilled at the sight of her hero—her deliverer, as she called him in her own mind.

Half-forgotten stories of old-time gallantry in the days of romance and chivalry—stories that her mother had told her as a little child—came rushing back to her mind as she looked at the man who, to-morrow, would be her husband.

"He is like a noble crusader. I am sure that they must have looked just like Dick," she told herself, fondly, using his Christian name for the first time.

He was speaking, in the rich melodious voice

that was one of his chief assets; the only person whom it had failed to move was the judge who sentenced him to seven years' penal servitude.

"I may as well come to the point at once, Mr. Carter," he said, with a scarcely perceptible wink which Molly did not see. "I want to marry your stepdaughter at once—to-morrow, by special licence, if it can be managed—and take her back to my home to England."

Molly looked entreatingly at her stepfather, but she said no word; her mouth was harsh and dry with anxiety, and her tongue felt like a strip of leather in her mouth.

Big Jim Carter spat on the ground before he replied, but he gave just the answer that Dick Earle expected, but which Molly had hardly dared to hope for.

"To-morrow! To-morrow!"

The words sung themselves with almost maddening sweetness into the young girl's brain, and echoed themselves in her heart.

Molly raced off to the forest to dance off some of the wild ecstasy that possessed her.

She cooed to the little wild things that became tame when she approached, and she told the birds of her wonderful good fortune.

"Oh, I am happy, so happy!" she whispered, as she made her way, last of all, to the little clearing in the forest where the pines met over the snow-covered mound which was her mother's grave.

"You are glad for me, mother dear, aren't you?" she said, with a note of passionate joy in her young voice.

Then, bending down, Molly pressed her warm, fresh lips to the snow which covered the little green hillock.

" Good-bye, mother, dear," she whispered, as she ran back to the log hut.

CHAPTER V

BIG JIM CARTER lost no time in repairing to the whisky saloon with part of the money for which he had bartered Molly, and as the glasses of spirit disappeared he became more and more communicative.

"My gal's sure makin' a match that'll turn Lone Pine Station the colour o' cheese. Dick Earle ain't none o' yer remittance gents, you bet 'e ain't. Got a place in England as good as the King's, an' the man who says 'e ain't is a liar," he boasted, looking round the saloon with fierce, bloodshot eyes.

In the ordinary way, the saloon would have demanded and obtained further details as to the lack of veracity, and have settled the question in the time-honoured way; but, even in a settlement so many miles away from normal life, the love of romance is strong, and everybody, especially the women, gathered eagerly around Big Jim Carter, anxious for all that he could tell them of his stepdaughter's love affair.

They made Molly's sudden engagement the excuse for many drinks—chiefly at her stepfather's expense—and when the whole assembly was in a most satisfactory mood for the promulgation of such an idea, one of their number,

called Bill the Bear, because of his prowess in killing bears, jumped to his feet, called for order, and began to speak.

Bill knew how to make an appeal. His eloquent voice, had been heard in many and many a famous church in England before the crash which wrecked his life came.

"Boys, we've had many a good song and dance from little Molly, Big Jim's stepdaughter, haven't we?" he asked, in opening his appeal.

"Sure," came from every throat present, in clear or husky but extremely hearty tones.

"Well, then, as we all know the—er——" Bill, ex-clergyman and drawing-room idol, coughed discreetly—"the parlous state of our friend's exchequer."

"Go on, yank it out, Bill. Say 'hard-up,' and then we'll all be able to understand you," broke in the only man who had followed the ex-clergyman's words.

"As we all know that Big Jim is, as usual, 'hard-up,' as my friend on the right puts it, I propose that we make a collection amongst ourselves for what is known in England as the bride's trousseau—that is, glad rags to be married in and wear after she is married," he said, with a smile that, in the old days, had been worth, literally, gold to him.

There was a shout of approval as Bill sat down. A collection of that sort appealed irresistibly to the sentiment which sleeps, but never wholly dies, in the hardest, roughest heart. Besides, each and every man present felt that the honour of Lone Pine Station was at stake, and for

Molly to be a shabby bride was not to be thought of for a single instant. Also, it was not felt to be quite in keeping with the traditions of Lone Pine Station to allow Molly's future husband to provide her marriage outfit.

"Contributions may be placed in here," announced Bill, sweeping off his wide-brimmed hat and placing it on the table in front of him.

There was a great jingling of loose coin in pockets, many thorough searchings of pocket-books, and a great many sly glancings at neighbours to see what they were preparing to give.

In many cases, this was doubled, and when the ex-clergyman returned to the table which had been specially cleared for him, there was a great, anxious silence, and a general air of expectancy pervading the whole saloon.

At home, in the little, bare, ugly bedroom which was soon to know her no more, Molly was sitting on the side of her bed, wishing with all her heart that there were such things as fairy godmothers, who came to girls when they needed them, so that she could have a beautiful dress to be married in.

It is one of the first impulses of a woman's nature to deck herself out bravely in order to do honour to the man she loves, and Molly shed many tears over the skimpy grey skirt and ugly brown jersey, which was all the clothes that she possessed. Never, in all her life, had she ever possessed a second frock to wear.

"And I haven't even a hat!" she groaned, as she looked at herself in the old cracked mirror,

and allowed two great tears to roll, unchecked, down her cheeks.

"If only mother hadn't cut up her wedding dress!" she sighed, as the far-off vision of a beautiful white satin frock that her mother had made from her own wedding dress for her, danced tantalisingly before her eyes.

Going slowly to the little black box which held all her treasures, Molly reverently drew out a wreath of faded orange blossom and a lace veil.

"I'll wear these, anyway," she said, as she placed the wreath on her crown of lovely hair and the veil over it.

While Molly was wishing vainly for the miraculous appearance of a fairy godmother, the part was being enacted, in a very rough, primitive, but undeniable fashion, by the trappers of Lone Pine Station in Jacques Gaspard's whisky saloon.

"The collection, boys, is just two hundred and fifty dollars," announced Bill, after he had counted the contributions a second time.

A noisy cheer greeted his words.

"Guess I'll take it home to Molly right away," said her stepfather, eagerly.

"I think you'll do nothing of the sort, Jim," was the ex-clergyman's quietly spoken, but full of meaning, reply.

The others expressed themselves much more forcibly, and seeing there was no hope of handling the money, Molly's stepfather, with a string of oaths, reeled out of the saloon.

"Good job he's gone. He won't be able to spoil the surprise now," observed Bill, as Big Jim's hulking form lurched out of sight.

All were agreed that matters had better be left entirely to the ex-clergyman, who had had more experience with women than any other man present.

"What I propose is that the money be spent on Molly's behalf, for if it is given to her, it won't remain with her very long, once she gets home." As he spoke, his eyes roamed round the saloon and fell on Jacques Gaspard's daughter, who was sitting, silent and sulky, in a corner.

"Your daughter is about the size of Molly, and the same age, isn't she?" he said, addressing the saloon-keeper.

"Zat is so," replied the little French-Canadian, wagging his head.

"Well, boys, what I propose is that Mrs. Gaspard accompanies me and her daughter to Kingsland City and that we get Molly as complete an outfit as possible for two hundred dollars in the best store there. The remaining fifty could be slipped into her hand when she's on the point of setting off for the journey to the church. How does that strike you all?"

Bill looked round at the crowd of rough, bearded faces, many of them bearing the marks of a dissipated life; but at that moment all were animated by one desire—the desire to help the little orphan who was going away from them to get married.

"Anything you say goes, Bill. It sure couldn't be bettered, that plan o' yourn," they all agreed.

The saloon-keeper's wife was quite eager to take the journey to the city to buy Molly's

trousseau. It was an opportunity for a jaunt that came all too seldom.

It was decided to let Molly's husband-to-be into the secret of the surprise gift, for the journey to and from the stores, part of which had to be accomplished by sleigh, would take fully three days; it was proposed to spend one night in the town.

"Oh, certainly, I'll put off the journey. I'm sure it's very kind of you all," said Dick Earle, fervently.

He was more than pleased, for the men's gift to Molly would save his own pockets. If they had not come forward, he would have been bound to buy her some decent clothes, since he could hardly travel to England with what he mentally called a bundle of rags!

"Oh, I'm sorry that it has to be put off, Dick. For how long, did you say? Four days? It will seem like four years," sighed Molly, when she heard.

CHAPTER VI

"YOU gotta go down to the saloon, I tell yer," and Big Jim Carter, who had religiously kept out of his stepdaughter's way since her departure from Lone Pine Station had been a settled thing, assumed a menacing expression—one which Molly knew only too well—as he spoke.

The saloon-keeper had intimated, with many mysterious nods and smiles, that Molly's presence at the saloon was required that evening—the last evening that she was to spend in Lone Pine Station.

Molly hated the idea of going. Simple as her preparations were, there were many little things to be done before she took her departure early in the morning.

Everything that she possessed to wear had been washed and scrubbed clean, and the little black box, containing her mother's letters, marriage certificate and wedding veil, constituted her sole luggage.

No bride had ever gone so poorly equipped to her husband as she was going, reflected Molly bitterly.

But when she got to the saloon a puzzled, surprised expression crept over her beautiful, mobile little face.

Nearly the whole of Lone Pine Station was crammed into the low, wooden structure, and something in the attitude of the men and women, something electric in the air, at once mystified and elated Molly.

Everybody was sober and most of the faces were clean. There had even been an attempt at personal decoration by a few.

Bill, tall, pale, and still somewhat ascetic-looking, sat at a table on which was laid out a number of bright, pretty feminine garments, all of them suitable for young girl's wear.

They had been looked at, but not touched, by everyone present.

Molly stood hesitating by the door, hardly knowing whether to go forward or not. She had only supposed that the saloon-keeper had wanted her to sing and dance for the last time to his customers.

But directly she was sighted, a dozen hands helped her into the midst of the gathering, and, sandwiched between fat Mrs. Gaspard and her envious, scowling daughter, Molly listened, surprise and joy ever deepening on her face, one emotion struggling to master the other as the tall ex-clergyman got to his feet.

Indicating the garments which were spread out on the table, he said in his best pulpit manner:

"The boys of Lone Pine Station have had much pleasure in making a little collection amongst themselves, and with the greater part of the money, I, acting on their behalf, and kindly assisted by Mrs. and Miss Gaspard"—he indicated the two women with a graceful little

bow—"I have had the honour of choosing a trousseau which will, I feel sure, delight you. Miss Osborne, will you kindly step this way?"

Molly stepped up to the table with her head in a wild, chaotic whirl. She tried to stammer out something, but no words came.

Bill, to whom possibly some memory of other days came, leaned forward with a curious brightness in his eyes.

"Do you like the things that I have chosen for you?" he said, in a kindly tone.

Molly picked up the garments one after another.

There was a dainty little frock of stiff white silk, embroidered with silken roses, and girdled with a silver rope—quite charming enough to delight the heart of any little bride, much less that of a girl who had never possessed a second dress in all her life.

Added to that was a pair of little white shoes and stockings and actually a pair of white silk gloves!

As Molly let the dainty things slip, one by one, through her fingers, a hot flush of shame rose to her cheeks to think that she had always deemed these rough, wild men devoid of sympathy and kindliness.

Somehow their generous gifts wiped out the memory of much that she had suffered, and at that moment she felt that she loved them, every one, with all their faults and failings.

There was a well-cut, serviceable little brown cloth coat and skirt, a silk shirt blouse, a brown felt hat, and a pair of beautifully fitting brown

leather shoes, such as Molly had never before even seen.

There were some other garments, too, in a neat, strong case, which Mrs. Gaspard had thoughtfully suggested buying, and which that good lady decided not to put on show.

Molly tried to thank them all, but the obstinate lump in her throat would not let her; but as each man and woman shook hands and wished good luck to "Carter's kid," they looked at the flushed, bright-eyed little face and sensed the gratitude which was welling up like a fountain in the innocent, childish heart.

The stars that shone so steadily in the steel-blue sky looked in at Molly, who was a stranger to sleep that night.

She drove back the tiny perplexing little thought which would persist at the back of her eager, excited mind that she knew almost nothing about the man who, to-morrow, would be able to claim the right to order her whole life.

Only to get away, to put as great a distance as possible between herself and Lone Pine Station! That was the all-important, dominating thought throughout that last night, which seemed so eternally long.

Molly rose when it was still dark, not having slept a wink.

According to all the books that have ever been written about girls who have passed a wakeful night, Molly should have been pale, wan-eyed, and listless.

But she was nothing of the sort! Vitality

glowed like a hidden fire in her agile, slender little body; her eyes gleamed bright and steady, and her whole being proclaimed her for what she was—an eager, intensely happy girl.

For the last time Molly surveyed herself in the old, cracked mirror; for the last time she used the rough delf wash-basin and jug, and she made hasty preparations for the last breakfast which she was to get ready in her stepfather's shack.

Dick Earle was to call for her at a very early hour—six o'clock—so that they could get that part of the journey which had to be made by sleigh to the nearest railway station well over before the train was due which was to bear them to Kingsland.

Big Jim Carter had evidently decided not to bid his stepdaughter farewell, for he did not appear to eat the breakfast which Molly had prepared, and neither was he anywhere around at six o'clock when Dick Earle, spruce, smiling, and in the best of spirits, appeared.

"By jove, little girl!"

He gave a long, low whistle of admiration as he beheld the girl who was to be his bride.

Molly was already dressed, and was waiting for him, the new suit-case which the men of Lone Pine Station had given her packed and standing on the floor by her side.

The Molly of the old grey skirt, woollen jersey, and long black curls was a pretty enough but pitiably shabby little figure, in his eyes; but this smartly dressed girl, with hair gracefully coiled around her head and glowing, eager face, was an entirely different creature.

There was real passion in Dick Earle's voice and in the grip of his arm around Molly's slender shoulders as he said, "You look good enough to eat, darling. Who would have thought that clothes would make so much difference? In ten hours from now—only six hundred minutes, dear little heart—you will be my wife. Oh, you beautiful little enchantress!" as Molly, emboldened by her lover's praise, put up her red lips for a kiss—the first time that she had voluntarily surrendered them to him.

"You've got the little black box safe in there—haven't you? The one with your mother's letters from her brother, and her marriage certificate, I mean," he said, in a voice which tried to be casual, but which betrayed anxiety in every note.

"Ah, yes, I couldn't go without those. They are the dearest things I possess," answered Molly, in a low voice.

"I think that you'd better let me keep the papers and things safe in my pocket-book for you. One never knows what may happen, and anything that is dear to you is also precious to me," said Molly's husband-to-be.

Completely won by his apparent concern for even the tiniest detail that affected her, deeply touched by his kindness, Molly took the little key out of her coat pocket, and, unlocking the case, withdrew the papers and handed them over.

"Now they are safe, sweetheart," said Dick Earle, with a little sigh of relief. He was, of course, genuinely anxious for the safety of the

papers which were to prove his wife's identity, and like a great many people, he felt that they could only be secured by immediate personal possession.

The whole of Lone Pine Station had turned out to witness Molly's departure. The sleigh was to start from the saloon, and the young girl's heart beat so fast when she saw it, with its six dogs all harnessed and ready, in charge of a half-breed, that she felt as if she could jump and laugh and shout and sing, all at once.

"But those days are past. I must behave like a married woman if I am to be one. What would Dick say if he saw me behaving like a silly baby?" and Molly, who was so completely a child at heart, took herself to task with all the seriousness which belongs to a child's outlook in some ways.

"Good-bye, Molly."

"Good luck, gel!"

"Don't fergit Lone Pine w'en yer a swell over in England."

The men and women, each glorying in the fact that they had some share in turning out so beautiful a bride, pressed round the sleigh, into which Molly was handed by Dick Earle as if she had been a princess, all talking and laughing together, in the highest good humour.

Only Bill, the tall ex-clergyman, who stood a little apart from the others, was grave.

At the last moment, just as they were about to start, when the dogs were straining impatiently at the leash and the half-breed driver was looking suggestively at his watch, he came forward, and in a voice which no living soul in

Lone Pine Station had ever heard him use, he said, thrusting a little black *suède* purse into Molly's hand, "This contains the rest of the money which the boys collected as your wedding present. Take care of the purse, for it belonged to the fairest and sweetest woman that ever lived. Good-bye, and—and God bless you."

A lump came suddenly into Molly's throat, and a mist blinded her eyes. Yet it was not the face of Bill that she saw, nor was it that of the handsome man by her side who was so soon to be her husband.

"Good-bye, and—God bless you."

It was a young, terribly earnest face, lit by a pair of blue, honest eyes that she saw for a moment—the face of the man who had fought for her not a couple of yards away and who had used at parting the very words that she had just heard.

"Good-bye, all, and thank you ever and ever so much. I shall never forget you. Good-bye."

Molly's young voice rang out on the crisp, cold air of the early morning, and her little white handkerchief fluttered from her fingers until the shouting, cheering crowd were out of sight.

The day had definitely come, and in every direction upon the horizon the wonderful glow of the sunrise shone, seeming to herald the day which was the most wonderful that had ever dawned to the lonely little bride.

They had to go for many miles through broken country, all spruce and pine forests, crag and valley, threaded by a hard white trail which was sometimes difficult to trace when coming out of

the dense growth through which they had often to pass.

Now and again the shrill cry or low growl of some hungry forest animal reached their ears, and then the half-breed driver leaned forward and spoke little kindly words of encouragement to the dogs, who have a keen scent when danger is near.

Journeys were taken as seldom as possible at that time of the year, when food is scarce and hard for the fierce wild animals to obtain. It is food that invariably lures them into the traps which are set for them.

Molly, who had never known any other life save that of the wild, was not at all disturbed by the frequent growls which sometimes came so ominously near. Dick Earle, however, who had never been out of Europe before, and who had all the horror of the city-bred individual for wild animals, other than in cages, leaned back silently in his seat, getting paler and paler every moment. His fingers were constantly feeling the revolver in his coat pocket.

Suddenly, without a second's warning, for no sound had broken the silence for several minutes, there was a great crash and a deafening roar as a huge black shape broke through the dense undergrowth at the side of the trail and loomed up, gigantic and terrifying, in their path.

It was a black bear, the biggest that even the half-breed had ever seen, and from the rapidity of her advance—for bears are never quick in the initial stages of attack—she was hungry and therefore dangerous.

"You lie down, missy, flat!" yelled the half-breed, as he bravely squared up to the animal, keeping tight hold of the reins with one hand, lest the terrified dogs should break loose and so made matters worse, while with the other he drew his revolver.

It was not his first encounter with a bear, and he knew the vital spots to aim at.

When his revolver was emptied of every cartridge he succeeded in wounding the ferocious animal so that she sank, incapable of further harm, to the ground.

Molly lay perfectly flat at the bottom of the sleigh, as the half-breed directed, but when she heard the heavy thud of the huge falling body, she knew that it was safe to get up.

She did so, and she turned instinctively to Dick Earle, who should have been by her side, but he was gone!

Molly's first thought was that Dick Earle had left the sleigh in order to help the half-breed driver. There was a thrill in the thought, as there ever has been and ever will be in the heart of women when their men folk do brave and reckless deeds. But the thrill departed like snow before the sun when she saw the expression on the face of the man who had, unaided, brought the huge animal to earth, and thus saved all three from a severe mauling, if not from death.

The dark face was turned towards the spot from whence came the sound of cracking branches and trampled undergrowth. On it was a look of contemptuous withering scorn.

"That English fool, he be sure scared to death

like a skippin' sheep. Gee! But he fine brave fella, missy!" And the man, who had momentarily forgotten the relationship between his passengers, turned to Molly as if expecting confirmation of his derisive words.

Molly's cheeks flushed with shame and the pain of disillusionment.

She wondered if she were dreaming, but the sight of the great, black, unwieldy beast whose blood was staining the snow crimson not five yards away was too painfully evident to allow the idea to remain long in her bewildered little head.

But this—this white-faced, terror-stricken creature who came crawling out from his place of concealment, like a whipped dog, his dark eyes bulging with fright as he glanced along the trail—was this her great-souled, noble-minded knight—the wonderful creature whom her imagination had conjured up?

Through Molly's fresh, unspoiled little heart there raced a perfect tumult of varied emotions as she stood by the side of the half-breed, watching her lover's progress as he came towards them. Certainly Dick Earle was a very poor peg on which to hang a romance at that moment.

His teeth chattered and a violent shiver passed all over his body as he raised himself from his ignoble, on-all-fours position, and addressing the half-breed driver, asked if he had any brandy.

"Me teetotal," was the curtly spoken reply.

Molly knew that the words were a lie, for only a minute before she had seen the man uncork a flask and take a long pull at it. He had also offered her a drink, which she had refused.

She bit her trembling little underlip with vexation that the man who was to be her husband —somehow it was now a distasteful thought— had merited such contempt from a half-breed.

"If you wanta be in time, you best get in," advised the driver, looking at his watch.

The killing of the bear, and the dragging of the dead animal off the trail, in which Dick Earle was pre-emptorily bidden to assist, had taken some time. It was doubtful if they would now be able to catch the train.

"How does my little sweetheart feel?" asked Molly's betrothed, as he solicitously tucked the skin rug around her and held it in place with an arm which still trembled, despite all his efforts to keep it steady. A little colour had come back to his face and the somewhat loose, fleshy mouth no longer sagged open. In fact, Dick Earle was almost, if not quite, recovered from his attack of funk, and he was now ready to take up his rôle of eager, devoted lover.

There is a very general impression that hugeness of frame and an appearance of great strength is necessarily accompanied by reckless bravery. Those with any worldly experience are fully aware that this is only another of the jokes which Nature often perpetrates. So many deathlessly brave deeds are done by little men and little women—so often those who look as if they could slay a Samson turn tail and flee at the slightest approach of danger.

As they drove through the bright, cold morning only the gush of the dogs' eager nostrils as they sniffed the air broke the silence.

Molly was not experienced enough in the ways of men to "camouflage."

She felt ashamed, and her whole shrinking form, as well as her downcast little face, betrayed the fact.

The arm which so closely pressed her waist now seemed irksome; it was no longer a shield between her and all that sought to do her harm. Dick Earle was savagely angry with himself for showing the white feather so plainly. He knew enough of the psychology of women to be fully alive to the fact that they will forgive almost anything save the one despicable trait of cowardice in their men.

"But she's such a little ignorant thing—almost a savage, in fact." Dick Earle got some comfort from reflections such as these, and when he had sufficiently reassured himself, ventured to draw Molly's face towards his, with the intention of wiping out all unpleasant memories with one of the long, passionate kisses which were beginning to be anything but a bore and a means to an end. But the faith of a young girl, at any time, is a terrible thing to shake. In the case of a girl of Molly's idealistic temperament it was infinitely worse.

There was no denying the cold, brutal fact. Dick Earle had come crashing down from the lofty pedestal on which she had placed him, and she no longer wanted to be his bride.

The lips that he kissed were cold, and there was no quick, warm pressure behind Molly's caress when she returned it.

At length he braced himself up to meet the

thoughts that he knew were in the young girl's mind.

"I know you think that I acted like a cad in running away from that brute of a bear. But, sweetheart," and his voice was carefully lowered to a tenderly pathetic pitch, "I think I ought to tell you that seven years ago I had an awful illness which even yet I have not recovered from. I—it robs me of the power of action and even of speech at critical moments. You—you do understand, darling, don't you?" and he finished on a note of passionate appeal.

A little frosty smile relaxed the grave severity of Molly's features.

The explanation appealed to her reason, but not to her heart.

Still, there was a little more warmth in her voice as she said, "Poor Dick!" and she laid one small gloved hand in his for a moment.

CHAPTER VII

"YOU'RE well late for the train, sonny. Gone ten minutes ago, an' it waited twelve over the time it was s'posed ter start, too. Next one won't be goin' till noon ter Oakham," volunteered the individual who was stationmaster, porter, signalman, and enquiry clerk combined of the little wayside station.

Molly wondered what was the explanation of the sudden, excited thrill which ran through her blood. There was certainly nothing pleasant in the prospect of a four-hours' wait in the draughty little box-like apology for a waiting-room which was all the accommodation that the station possessed.

Dick Earle smothered a curse, and the driver who stood by his steaming, impatient dogs looked indifferent. He had long ago lost all interest in the bridal pair.

He was paid—just the amount that he asked—and once again Molly read contempt for her lover in the half-breed's eyes.

"Is there any place where we can feed and get warm?" asked Dick Earle, turning to the stationmaster, who was eyeing Molly in an unmistakably admiring fashion.

"Not for six miles, an' you an' the lady 'ud hev ter hoof it. Better let me make you a

fire in there." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the waiting-room. "And I've got a few tinned goods that'll make a bully breakfast washed down with a cup o' tea," he said, kindly.

"Oh, thank you—thank you very much," exclaimed Molly, who was drawn towards the prospect of a meal much more than she was towards her prospective husband, who stood, with hands in pockets and scowling brows, frowning at the inoffensive stationmaster.

"I suppose you haven't anything stronger than tea? A bottle of whisky, perhaps?" he said, at length.

"Sure, I have got just that, sonny. You and the lady go in an' sit down, an' I'll soon fix yer both up."

The excellent man carried out every promise to the letter.

In half an hour Molly and Dick Earle were sitting in front of a roaring wood fire, with a rudely served but appetising breakfast before them.

The sight of the tea cheered Molly, and at the first glimpse of the whisky bottle Dick Earle's face brightened.

"Come, this is almost like being married! Let's make believe that this ugly bare box is the dining-room of my home in England—the home in which you will reign as queen, darling," said the ex-convict in a husky, passionate whisper.

But there was no "make-believe" left in Molly. She only stared rather drearily out on to the shining metals which, in four hours' time, would play their part in bearing her towards the

church where the clergyman would unite her for ever to the man who was so steadily emptying the whisky bottle on the opposite side of the table.

When he had finished more than half its contents, Dick Earle staggered to his feet, and pushing by Molly as if she were not there, he stretched himself on the floor in front of the blazing fire, and in a few seconds was fast asleep, mouth widely open and snoring loudly at the intake of every breath.

The vague uneasiness that had disturbed Molly after her lover's pitiful exhibition of cowardice was as nothing compared with the wave of almost physical sickness and repulsion that now swept over her senses, engulfing every fibre of her being with its nauseating ugliness.

"To be tied for life to that cowardly, drunken creature! I won't—I won't—I won't!"

There was nobody but a few stray jackals to hear Molly's impassioned outburst, and to witness the sight of her eager, intensely vital little figure held taut and rigid, her grey eyes alight with determination, and her small fists clenched in bitter anger against the snoring, senseless mass upon the wooden floor.

"Probably, when he had got tired of me, he would beat me when he had taken too much drink, and I've had quite enough of that, already."

The resolve that, whatever happened, she would not marry Dick Earle was like a powerful stimulant to Molly's overcharged heart, but it found no solution to the problem of what was to become of her if she did not.

"Rather than go back to Lone Pine Station I'll kill myself," muttered Molly, between the little white teeth that clenched as if in painful recollection of the desolate spot where her entire life had been spent.

Suddenly, her sharp ears caught the sound of a train in the distance.

Rushing to the door of the lean-to waiting-room, Molly strained her young eyes in eager, passionate hopefulness.

The inspiration that she had sought, the solution to her problem, had come.

Nearer and nearer came the train, the blessed train that was to form the means of escape from the man whom Molly most emphatically did not now want to marry.

"He won't wake for several hours," murmured the young girl, with a contemptuous side-glance at the man who was sleeping and snoring like a beast in front of the fire.

Just as the train stopped, with a funny little protesting grunt, Molly snatched up her suit-case and made a bound for the nearest carriage, just as the stationmaster ambled leisurely out of his quarters to have a brief chat with the engine-driver, reaching the front of the train long after Molly had shrunk into the furthermost corner of her compartment, which, fortunately, was an empty one.

Every nerve was on edge; a million demon voices kept shrieking at once, "Go back, go back!"

It seemed as if months passed until the train, with a mighty jerk which nearly threw Molly to

the floor, started—until she knew that she was safe from the man who had brought her away from Lone Pine Station on the understanding that she would be his wife.

It was Molly's first train ride, and though the rate of progress was slow, even for that part of the country, it was terrifying to the overwrought, frightened girl who had so little experience to guide her.

The green canvas suit-case, which held the pretty white clothes that were to have done credit to Lone Pine Station, was on the seat beside her, and the black *suède* purse with fifty dollars—wealth to Molly—was snug and safe inside the pocket of her new brown coat.

Taking a quick look around as if the tiny compartment might have a thief in hiding, the inexperienced little traveller drew out her precious purse and took a long, satisfied look at the crisp bills so neatly tucked away in two pockets.

There was also a slip of white paper that was not a dollar bill, and the sight of it caused the pink flush in Molly's cheeks to deepen to red, and into her eyes there came an expression of wistful longing.

"Jack Lorimer, 14 Lower Point Road, Mintonville," she read, with a little sharp tug at her heart. And the clean-cut, serious face of the man whose last words she would never forget rose up in her mind side by side with that of Dick Earle—and Dick Earle suffered sadly by the comparison.

"Will this train take me to Mintonville, I wonder?"

Molly had no more knowledge of trains than a baby, and so she kept her seat until, three hours later, the train pulled up with a jerk, and did not show signs of resuming the journey.

They had reached the terminus.

"Where for, missy?" enquired a young porter, who went through each compartment in turn, on the look-out for any property that might be left by forgetful passengers.

"Oh, I—er—please, am I anywhere near Mintonville?" enquired Molly, with an uneasy flush which heightened the beauty of her charming little face so that the young porter became most respectfully attentive.

"Mintonville, missy? Oh, no, you are a long way from thet city," he said, pushing his cap to the back of his head, and wondering who the lovely girl with the green suit-case could be, who seemed so uncertain of her bearings.

"Let's look at yer ticket, missy," he said, suddenly.

"I haven't got one. I left it at—I mean, my —Mr. Earle had it," stammered Molly, wretchedly confused.

The young porter's manner underwent a change.

"Where you from?" he asked.

Eventually, after parting with several of her precious bills and having answered several questions, Molly was put in the right train with instructions not to get out until she saw "Mintonville" marked up on a big black board.

The journey occupied several hours, during which Molly had plenty of time for thought.

She was going to the man who had promised to be her friend should she ever need one. She had implicit faith in his word; she needed him, and that was sufficient.

Life suddenly became a sweet, joyous, nerve-tingling adventure instead of one long round of beatings and semi-starvation, with those endless evenings of dancing and singing in the whisky saloon.

All Molly's youthful blood raced at the prospect of the many adventures which must surely lie ahead of her!

"Please, will you tell me how I get to this place?" she asked, when at length she got out of the train at Mintonville.

It was almost night in the little city, which took its name from its founder, James Minton, an extremely lucky gold miner of fifty years back.

It was a flourishing, very progressive little city, and Molly, who had never in her life seen houses of more than one storey, looked in awe and admiration at the shops which could be discerned on the other side of the ticket barrier.

The ticket collector read the pencilled address by the light of his oil lamp.

"Oh, it's a good walk down the main road and lies four turnings to your left. 'Bout two miles altogether," finished the man.

The main road was a long straight street, very dimly lit, and flanked on both sides by extremely modest little houses and shops.

But to Molly they were wonderful palaces, and she supposed that surely the people must be

very rich to afford such luxurious dwelling-places.

She had certainly seen pictures of even bigger houses in the illustrated magazines which sometimes found their way into the whisky saloon at Lone Pine Station; but even a good picture never quite approaches the thing which is actually seen.

Molly had also seen pictures of gorgeous automobiles, but her knowledge of them extended no further than that.

She certainly did not know that the hooter was intended to act as a warning to anybody in the way of its progress.

"Toot—toot—toot!"

Two big glaring lights, which lit up the whole road for a good distance ahead, showed Molly's little, straight, boyish figure walking steadily along, right in the path of the big motor-car.

As she did not move, the young man who was driving sounded another irritated warning upon his hooter.

"Hang the girl! Is she deaf, I wonder?" muttered Jimmy Minton, the grandson of the founder of Mintonville, and owner of more than half the city.

He owned the big copper and iron mines, and had a magnificent house, where he lived with his aunt and her daughter for six months of the year, on top of a hill just outside the city.

As there was no room for him to pass if the girl who barred his way persisted in staying in the middle of the road, he was obliged to pull up.

"Can't you hear?" he shouted, angrily.

Molly turned round, and the bright lights fell on her exquisite pale little face.

"My sainted aunt! Where outside of a picture gallery would one see a face like that? Who the deuce is she?" And young Minton, who knew Paris and London much better than he knew Canada, quickly forgot his anger and doffed his cap.

"Good evening. I'm sorry I spoke so sharply just now. May I ask where you are going?"

Jimmy Minton's father had insisted on an English education for his son, and the result was that little, if any, of his Canadian accent remained.

"I'm going to 14 Lower Point Road. I want to see Mr. Lorimer," explained Molly, courteously and gravely.

"Lorimer? Why, he's one of my hands—works in the big copper mine. Are you, perhaps, his sister?"

A shade of more than ordinary interest mingled with the courtesy of the young man's tone. But Molly was ignorant of it.

"Oh, no! He's a—a friend," she replied, raising her steady grey eyes to the dark, flashing ones of the man who was looking at her, did she but know it, far too boldly.

Suddenly Jimmy Minton, who had been smitten immediately with the little stranger's beauty, noticed that she was carrying a suitcase. It provided him with just the opportunity he sought.

"Lower Point Road is a good two miles further on. You must allow me to give you a

lift as far as there. Give me that, please," And without waiting either for Molly's refusal or consent, the young man, with that masterful manner which had always charmed the girls in England, seized the case containing her bridal outfit and swung it into the *tonneau* of the car.

"Jump in," he said, helping Molly into the luxuriously padded motor and giving her arm a little soft, intimate squeeze as he did so.

The fact that she had not made a fuss about accepting his offer gave Jimmy Minton an entirely wrong impression of Molly. He was not a vicious young man at all, but he was fond of pretty faces and the lighter form of love-making known as flirting.

No sooner had they started than, holding the wheel with one hand with the assurance of an expert driver, he thrust out the other and drew Molly towards him.

"What are you going to give me for this nice ride—a kiss?" he asked, in the light, easy tone of one who takes consent for granted.

Molly had none of the mock modesty which so often spoils the girls of large towns and cities. But her little figure grew rigid in the circle of the arm which held her, and in a voice which the young man knew to be absolutely sincere, she said, "Please don't make me kiss you —it—it reminds me of something that I want to forget. I will get out of your machine if you like, but I cannot kiss you."

Jimmy Minton's smooth, dark head was thrust forward and his eyes travelled quickly, but com-

prehensively, over Molly's deadly serious little face. Instantly he relaxed his hold upon her.

"Good heavens, as innocent as a blessed baby! What *is* she doing here, all alone, I wonder?"

When Jimmy Minton "wondered" it was the preliminary to getting that wonder appeased. Many people in the rich young man's circle still hoped that he would one day make a famous lawyer, because of his almost uncanny skill in cross-questioning.

It was easy to satisfy his curiosity with regard to Molly. Indeed, unless she had evaded the truth, Molly had no choice but to tell this clever young man all about herself.

When he had learned all that he could, Jimmy Minton sat back in the car, a more thoughtful expression than usual on his handsome, if weak-looking, face.

Undoubtedly, if Molly had not been so well favoured in the matter of looks, he would have put her down at the door of Jack Lorimer's lodgings, and have promptly forgotten all about her. But, combined with her charm and beauty, Molly's story had a generous spice of romance in it; and Jimmy Minton's chief hobby in life was searching for that elusive, fascinating element—Romance.

He cleared his throat once or twice and stopped the car at the top of Lower Point Road, which was, in reality, only a narrow street of straggling wooden houses in which there was no room to turn the car.

"Er—excuse me for mentioning it, Miss Osborne, but if this chap Lorimer isn't able to

do anything for you—anything in the way of immediate accommodation, I mean—what will you do?"

He waited eagerly, a little furrow on his forehead, for Molly's reply. He thought that her profile in repose was the loveliest thing that he had ever seen.

"I have some money, you know." Molly pulled out the black *suède* purse from the pocket of her jacket with a charming little air of independence as she spoke.

"Perhaps Mr. Lorimer will be able to tell me of some place to stay, and very soon I will get some work to do. I can cook and clean and sew, and I'd rather do any of these things than sing and dance in a saloon, as I had to do in Lone Pine Station," she continued, thoughtfully, knowing nothing of the average city girl's distaste for such homely things as those she had mentioned.

"Oh, but I can't allow you to do that—really! Look here, Miss Osborne, if Lorimer can't help you, will you accept the hospitality of my home until you are able to look around you? I—I'm interested in you. I live with my aunt and girl cousin, you know. I think it wanted a lot of pluck to act as you did, and you'll be bound to want help."

Molly's heart warmed towards the strange young man who seemed so kind and friendly. Yet the sturdy spirit which had maintained her through five years of her stepfather's brutality rebelled against accepting favours from one on whom she had no claim.

She was about to gratefully decline, when

Jimmy Minton, who, the more he was opposed the keener he became, bent forward and said, with obstinate determination in every tone of his voice, "I'll drop you here, Miss Osborne, but in half an hour's time I'll call at number fourteen to see what Lorimer has been able to do for you. You can tell him that I am coming, if you like." And as Molly stepped lightly out of the car, and started off down the little straggling street, suit-case in hand, Jimmy Minton's admiring eyes followed her, and a new altogether delightful sensation of warmth entered his susceptible heart.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK LORIMER was in the bedroom which he shared with his landlady's son when that good lady, with many asthmatic grunts, climbed up the steps and informed him that a young woman was waiting downstairs in the kitchen for him.

Jack turned from the basin where he was washing, and faced his landlady,

"Who—what kind of a young woman?" he stammered, the blood rushing in a tell-tale flood to his forehead, for there was only room for one young woman in his life; and Jack Lorimer did not apply that cold, definite term to the girl who had looked at him from the door of a whisky saloon one starry night; who had looked her way into his very heart, dominated his entire world until everything in it meant Molly, the girl he loved.

There was so much passion and poetry in the nature of the strong, simple, chivalrous young Canadian. There was nothing that he would not have done for the little girl who had power like a mighty avalanche to change the current of his thoughts and his whole life.

Before, he had been content to live the life of his mates—a hard worker, a splendid fighter, something more of a thinker and reader than

they, but with hardly any desire to rise to the level of, say, Jimmy Minton, his young employer.

But since the coming of love, ambition had awakened in the young miner. It mounted to the skies on the mad, passionate wings of his desire.

He wanted Molly—heavens, how he wanted her! But he was too true a son of the north to imagine that wanting and dreaming would bring him any nearer to the goal of his desire.

It sometimes maddened him almost beyond endurance to think of his penniless condition, and, like all young lovers, the knowledge that the one girl in the world was coming into daily contact with other men—was, indeed, free to be wooed and won by any of them—added yet another torment to his life.

He had no idea of the life that Molly lived with her stepfather, or he would have set out at once—on foot, if there had been no other way—and have risked marrying without a penny to offer his girl.

His hours in the mine were often long and the work was exacting and unhealthy; the pay extremely poor in comparison with the risks that must inevitably be taken with all underground occupations.

For weeks past Jack Lorimer had been trying to make up his mind to leave Mintonville and his work in the city, but having no capital to start upon, the way seemed dark and perilous.

He often thought longingly of a set of fellows who were planning to strike the trail further

north towards the Yukon with the idea of examining a certain portion of the land which was reputed to hold gold.

Meantime, to outward appearances, Jack had not improved for the better since his return from Europe.

The girls of Mintonville were mad over him, and he might have had his choice of the buxom, clear-eyed young women, any one of whom would have made him an excellent wife.

His landlady also had a daughter who was one of Jack's fervent admirers, and as her mother would have a reflected glory in her daughter's triumph, she made no secret of her wishes with regard to Annie and her young lodger.

"Yes, she's waiting down there. You'd best hurry. Tea's about ready," said Mrs. Timber, very tartly, for Molly's dainty beauty, taken in conjunction with her lodger's furiously red face, had given her a clue to an unpleasant discovery.

"I'll be down right now," answered Jack, rubbing his scarlet face vigorously with the rough towel in his hand.

Since Mrs. Timber had not been able to give him the name of his visitor, he knew that she could not be a Mintonville girl.

His handsome young face would have repaid the attention of a student of physiognomy as he ran quickly down the narrow staircase and entered the kitchen where Molly sat, enthroned like a young queen, with three of Mrs. Timber's lodgers staring at her in solemn, silent admiration.

Yes, there she was, the girl who had caught and held his heart a willing captive ever since he had first beheld her.

It seemed, somehow, unreal—like part of a heavenly dream that would vanish with returning consciousness that Molly should be there, in Mrs. Timber's narrow, none too clean, little kitchen, which smelled so strongly of fried steak and onions and which was so unsuitable a frame for so much beauty and charm.

Annie Timber, familiarly known as "Bonnie" because of her generous build, had never seemed out of place in the ugly little house. Indeed, Jack had never realised that the house was mean and confined in space until he began to think of Molly in connection with a home.

Tom Rogers, Sandy Jinks, and Dusty Miller —three fine fellows in their respective ways— were all looking at the smartly attired little runaway bride as if she had been some rare and wonderful specimen of animal life that they had never before beheld.

Their confusion was very manifest when Jack, looking like a freshly washed young Hercules, appeared in the doorway.

"Guess I've made a date with a pal, and I'm a bit late," volunteered two of the lads, as they rose awkwardly to their feet, having some dim sort of notion that Molly would prefer to see their fellow-lodger alone.

But they had reckoned without Mrs. Timber, who, giving her daughter a meaning glance, exclaimed, "No, you've not made dates, neither of you, so don't tell sech lies! You stop in an'

hev yer teas, and don't mind no interruptions." This with a hostile glance towards the little figure in brown.

Molly, extremely sensitive, rose, her lips trembling ominously. Up till then there had passed no word between her and Jack Lorimer. The young miner had contented himself with wringing the little gloved hand and looking all the love that was in his great, honest, kindly heart.

As for Molly, her tongue seemed to be tied. Somehow, it was all so different from what she had expected. As a matter of fact, she was just beginning to realise that rushing in this way to the man who had offered to be her friend might prove extremely awkward for him and eventuate in a situation which would be difficult for him to explain.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't come! I wish I hadn't!" Molly was saying to herself, as, with flaming cheeks and bright eyes, she looked rather helplessly from one to another of the strained, silent group in the hot little kitchen.

Jack also felt the tension in the atmosphere, and floundered wildly in his mind for some means of getting Molly to himself. Mrs. Timber's lack of hospitality enraged him, and he was too essentially simple and modest to stumble across the reason for it.

There was only one living-room in the lodging house; the rest were all bedrooms. There was nothing for it but to go outside if he wanted to talk to Molly.

"I reckon a walk would be just fine," he

said at length, clumsily, and with laboured enthusiasm.

Wishing more ardently than ever that she had never come, feeling that all the joy and glamour of her adventure was fizzling out, Molly followed her handsome escort, who was supremely happy just because he was breathing the same air as she.

The moon was riding bravely in the sky, and though the air was cold, it was not piercing. The stars seemed less remote than usual, twinkling down, as if smiling upon the young couple who had nowhere but the street in which to talk.

Noticing that Molly had brought her suit-case, the young miner stretched out his hand.

" Give it to me," he said, and when he took it a thrill ran all over him just because it was Molly's little hand that had last grasped the handle.

Taking a side turning, he led Molly out of the street, and on to a vast tract of uncultivated prairie land, which sliped away to the north in a noble range of snow-capped hills.

It was characteristic of Jack Lorimer to strip off his overcoat and make it into a pad for her to sit upon, as he placed it upon the stump of a fallen tree.

The young miner was fiercely, wildly glad that Molly had come, but before he allowed her to speak she must first be made comfortable.

And now that the great, longed-for moment was here, Molly felt suddenly shy and ill at ease, not knowing what to say in explanation of her presence in Mintonville.

Then, like a child eager to get the worst part of an ordeal over first, she blurted out, "I couldn't stay any longer with Big Jim, Mr. Lorimer. He—he beat me black and blue and 'most starved me. Mr. Earle came and asked me to marry him, so I said 'Yes.' But," she added naïvely, "I've run away."

In her confusion, Molly gave Jack Lorimer to understand that she was married and had, for some reason or another, left her husband and come to him. The whole world—his portion of it—seemed to come crashing down with relentless swiftness and soul-numbing heaviness.

Molly was married! She did not love the fellow, but she had done it in order to escape from her brute of a stepfather.

Jack Lorimer silently cursed the man who had driven a girl, while still almost a child, into a loveless marriage, but the red-hot iron of primitive hatred of his rival seared his soul as he reflected that possibly Molly's husband was also a brute. And yet. . . . He peered anxiously into the little flushed face which looked so ethereally lovely in the strong white moonlight, and what he saw reassured him.

Molly did not look as if she were hunted and harassed, but still, the ugly, incontestable fact remained—she was married, and his love-dream was ended!

"You—you have left your husband?" said the young miner, at length controlling his voice with difficulty.

Molly looked at him in surprise, her grey eyes widening.

"Oh, I didn't carry out my promise to marry Mr. Earle! I couldn't. You see, he was such a coward, and he got horribly drunk in the waiting-room of the railway station. So I—I just left him and—here I am!"

But all the details that she gave were lost upon the man who listened, and who grasped only one cardinal fact in the whole story, which was that the girl he loved was not married, but free—free to be wooed and won in a man's fashion, and best and most blessed of all thoughts, she had turned to him for help when she needed it!

Though all these thoughts were careering madly through his heated brain, Jack Lorimer stood still and silent, massive as the distant hills which were outlined in the moonlight, and apparently as solid and unchangeable as they.

His silence dismayed Molly. Her underlip quivered a little, and she passed one hand a trifle wearily over her forehead.

It was a mad, stupid, forward thing to do; she could see that quite plainly now that it was too late. What must Mr. Lorimer be thinking of her?

She recalled the case of Jacques Gaspard's daughter who was violently in love with a man, and whom she was said by everyone in the station to have "run after."

Surely—and a hot flush mounted to the roots of Molly's hair as the thought came—surely this big, silent man who was looking at her so queerly did not think the same of her?

Her voice was a poor, thin little wisp of a thing as she laid a hand on her suit-case and said,

" I'll go now, Mr. Lorimer. I—it was very stupid of me to come, and if I had thought, I wouldn't have troubled you for anything. I—I'm so sorry," she finished, humbly.

It was the soft little catch in Molly's voice, the unconsciously pathetic appeal of it that drove almost every vestige of sane, coherent thought from Jack Lorimer's brain.

That she—his little queen—should think that she had done wrong in coming to ask for his help, in claiming the fulfilment of a promise that he had made! Why, he would scale the stars, and give her the moon for a plaything if she wanted it, had such a thing been possible!

But true love thinks ever of the beloved, and puts self last, and Jack Lorimer was incapable of that light, easy affection which masquerades as love and fades as quickly as a flower deprived of water.

After those first few mad moments, during which he was apparently as cold as the hills towards which their young faces were set, thoughts of the future took shape in his mind and kept him from uttering his burning, lava-hot thoughts.

The future! What future had he to offer Molly?

He had not a single penny saved, and his wages were utterly inadequate to support a wife.

A vision of the homes in London with Molly dressed as he had seen the women dressed in those beautiful, brightly lit rooms, came to him, and then, as a crude, horrible contrast, the picture of Mrs. Timber's rough, mean little house, which

smelled eternally of cooking; but even that was beyond his means at present.

A little groan forced itself between his teeth. It was a groan of misery at his own absolute impotence, but to Molly it sounded like an exclamation of impatience.

More than ever she wished that she had never come to Mintonville, never thrust herself upon a man who quite clearly was at a loss to know what to do with her.

"I—I'm moving on to-morrow, Mr. Lorimer. I'll surely be able to get work of some kind," said Molly, in a crestfallen little voice, after a somewhat prolonged silence.

"Yes," said Jack Lorimer, in a rather absent voice. His eyes were drinking in the beauty of the little face uplifted to his, and his mind was filled with schemes for getting on rapidly, so that he could ask Molly to share his life.

But every fibre of his manhood revolted against taking advantage of her helplessness in order to win her for his own.

But all the time that these emotions and ideas were chasing each other in his fevered brain, his lips were silent, and every moment increased Molly's sense of hurt surprise that she was not made more welcome by the man who had been so urgent in making her promise to use him if ever she needed a friend!

Love is the most sensitive of all growths, and the seeds, once sown, have to be tenderly cared for if they are to blossom and bring forth their glorious fruit.

The handsome young miner had sown the seeds

of love in Molly's heart on the night when he had fought Bill the Skunk; but the very force of his passion and the depth of his love made him apparently indifferent, and Molly was suffering that crowning humiliation of maidenhood in the thought that she had given her heart unasked!

CHAPTER IX

"I SURE hev no room fer you all great hulkin' fellows as it is. No, there's not an inch of space in my house, Jack Lorimer, an' I don't mind sayin' my mind, which is that no respectable woman in Mintonville will take in a young gel that's all alone."

The speaker was Mrs. Timber, Jack's landlady, and the look of indignation on her fat red face was accompanied by a virtuous sniff.

All the blood in the young miner's body seemed to mount to his head in a singing flood, so intense was his humiliation that Molly should be present to hear all that Mrs. Timber said in such an undeservedly coarse fashion.

Yet it was impossible to conduct his conversation with her in another room, and equally impossible to leave Molly outside in the cold street.

The young girl's cheeks were flushed to the deep red of carmine, and her eyes held tears that were ready to fall at any moment.

Such a wild, chaotic medley of emotions were rioting through Molly's heart—shame at the position in which she had so impulsively and unthinkingly placed herself, and pity for Jack, who was trying so manfully to induce his landlady to accommodate her for that one night.

"I can pay you well, Mrs. Timber, and to-morrow I would try to make some other arrangement," said Molly, producing her black *suède* purse, which indeed looked substantial and well filled.

"It isn't that. It's turning my boy out, the one that shares with Jack Lorimer," said the unyielding woman, and there seemed so much common-sense in the reason for her refusal that neither Molly nor Jack said any more, but both looked at each other helplessly.

A city in the backwoods of Canada is not a city in the British sense of the word; often it is no more than a village, in which all the people know each other, and Mintonville, which was almost entirely populated by the workmen in the tin and copper mines, possessed absolutely no resources in the way of accommodation for the chance traveller.

They were still wondering what they could do when a loud, impatient rapping sounded upon the door.

Mrs. Timber hurried to open it, and the next moment Jimmy Minton, fresh, rosy, and smiling, looking every inch what he was—a rich young proprietor—entered the mean little room, bringing a rush of cold, keen air in with him.

His astrachan collar was buttoned tightly around his throat, and he removed his cap from his sleek, well-shaped head with a hand encased in a big bearskin glove.

"Good evening, Mrs. Timber; good evening, Lorimer," he said, good-humouredly, nodding first at the abashed woman, who stood in the

background with her arms folded in her apron, and then at his tall, young employé, whose massive frame seemed to fill the tiny apartment.

Both Mrs. Timber and Jack were wondering what the young boss, as Jimmy Minton was called, could possibly want; but Molly knew, and instantly she reproached herself for having forgotten to tell Jack of the adventure that had befallen her on the road from the station.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Osborne. Has Lorimer been able to fix up anything for you?"

Molly's name came so glibly from his young master's lips that Jack Lorimer's face expressed his thoughts quite as clearly as words could have done.

"How did you come to know Molly, and when?"

The sunburned, handsome face asked the question quite plainly.

Jimmy Minton read it, and answered in words, taking in the situation immediately.

"I met Miss Osborne on the road from the station, and she allowed me to give her a lift in my car. On the way she told me that her visit to Mintonville was unexpected, and, knowing the place, I guessed that she would have some difficulty in getting put up at a moment's notice. So—er—under the circumstances, I offered her the hospitality of Log House for the night."

It was all so easily and smoothly explained; the whole situation was so obvious, and undoubtedly it was very kind of the young master to interest himself in Molly, who was a perfect stranger to him.

But, though his solicitous regard for Molly appealed to Jack Lorimer's steady head, it in no wise assuaged the sudden flame of bitter jealousy which burnt into his heart.

"If she had been old or ugly or poorly dressed, he would not have cared a hang whether she spent the night under a roof or under the stars," he thought, going straight to the pith of the matter in characteristic fashion.

But the man was his employer; he was bound to listen respectfully to him, although his instinct, primitive enough and absolutely devoid of reason, was to order him quietly but firmly outside, and to warn him that Molly was his wife-to-be.

"Are you able to fix the young lady, Mrs. Timber?" asked Jimmy Minton, once more, and with a touch of impatience in his jovial tones.

"I'm afraid not," was the woman's reply, given in a voice which suggested that she was deeply pained to be unable to oblige.

"Then that settles it. My car's at the end of the road, Miss Osborne, and Mrs. Minton will be delighted to offer you hospitality for to-night. We'll take good care of your little friend, Lorimer," said the rich young mine-owner, giving a careless nod in Jack's direction.

Jimmy Minton flashed a quick, keen glance from the handsome figure which bulked so hugely in the one dim gas-jet that lit the tiny kitchen to Molly—slim, dainty, and looking like a little grey-eyed elf by comparison with her tall, broad-shouldered lover.

A delicate flush suffused the little pale face, making it a thing of exquisite loveliness to the young mine-owner, whose chief interest in life was striving for the unattainable.

He was an intelligent young man in many ways, and prided himself upon his ability to read character.

Sometimes he was right in his surmises, but in summing up Jack Lorimer he made a vital blunder.

"The stupid clod, to think that he would be able to attract a thing of fire and spirit such as that little creature," he thought, half contemptuously.

Aloud, he said, in a perfectly conventional manner:

"Then we have disposed of the problem of where Miss Osborne is to spend the night."

Jack Lorimer called himself all kinds of names for feeling so desperately helpless when he saw Molly, with her suit-case, enter the big car, handed in by his master with as much ceremony as if she had been a little queen.

Because he finds her fair, and so eminently desirable, a lover firmly believes that the whole race of men are in a conspiracy to steal the woman of his heart, and the same thing applies to a girl in love.

Jack Lorimer's rugged simplicity was the very bedrock on which his nature was founded, but he was a man in love, and another man, who possessed many advantages which he lacked, was displaying a warm interest in her.

As he watched the tail lights of the splendid

car dwindle and finally disappear into the night, he said, in a bitter voice, which was half strangled with the force of his love. "He holds all the cards—every blessed one of 'em."

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CHAPTER X

THE wind rushed in stinging gusts past Molly's ears as the car, with that soft, velvety purr which denotes ideal mechanism, ate up the long white ribbon of road which led to the magnificent residence known as "Log House," not because there was a single log in its construction, but in memory of the first little house which the founder of Mintonville had built in the forest, and in which his married life had begun.

The keen, cold air whipped roses into Molly's cheeks and made her eyes sparkle with bewitching brightness. A strand of her hair escaped from its pins and blew across Jimmy Minton's face.

A little laugh escaped his lips as he felt the silky, clinging strand.

"Oh, you shouldn't have touched it! It's the nicest thing that's happened to me to-day," he said, with more warmth in his tones than Jack Lorimer would have approved.

Molly said nothing, for the simple reason that there seemed nothing to say, but she fastened the truant curl up very securely so that the incident could not possibly be repeated.

Unused as she was to any but the roughest ways and manners, she felt vaguely uneasy

about accepting the kindness of Jack Lorimer's employer.

But Jack had consented to her going, and simple as she was in many ways, Molly knew enough to be aware that she must not injure him in his employer's eyes by taking exception to words which were probably forgotten as soon as they were spoken.

But she rated her own charms too low, for the man at her side was already succumbing to the most unusual type of beauty that he had ever met.

The blood was running faster in his veins, and he was eager to have Molly under his own roof, to feast his eyes upon her at his leisure, and to see what kind of mind lay behind that mask of lovely flesh.

To do him justice, the young mine-owner had absolutely no intention of trying to cut out Jack Lorimer with the charming little girl at his side; instinct, that sure guide of man as well as woman, told him that the young miner loved her. All he wanted was the novelty of seeing her in surroundings which were worthy of her, and he fully expected the sensation to be a purely temporary one, as had been all the others.

"It's a glorious night, isn't it?" he whispered to the silent girl beside him.

"Yes," agreed Molly, in a whisper.

There was a moment's pause, during which the car entered a pair of massive wrought-iron gates, and, bathed in moonlight, the huge house, just now fully lit, came in sight.

Molly gasped, her grey eyes wide.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy Minton, slowing down the motion of his car almost to a crawl.

"Why, it's—it's like a palace, the sort of place you would expect a king to live in," said Molly, in an awed little voice.

Her companion laughed and peered forward into her face to see if the emotion were genuine.

She glanced up again at the big house with its many lighted windows, and wondered if a great many people lived in it. A sudden feeling of coldness and desolation came over her, and she longed for Jack, who was so comforting and big and kind, and who would understand if she just said that she felt frightened to go into such a grand mansion all by herself.

But there was little time for indulgence in vague, indefinite fears, for her smiling escort was holding out a hand for her to alight.

"Welcome to Log House, Miss Osborne, and don't be frightened of us. We are very homely people, I assure you," he said, in warmly courteous tones, holding Molly's arm as he assisted her up the three broad marble steps which led to the front door.

He did not knock, but let himself in with a latchkey.

There was another involuntary gasp from Molly as she stepped into the finest hall that her eyes had ever beheld.

It was quite a handsome, but conventional lounge hall, furnished in the style of an English country mansion.

A log fire burnt cheerily in a carved oak fire-

place, mats stood about a bright polished floor; while the flames flickered and lit up a most beautiful collection of carved copper wares and plates which stood on an oak dresser at the far end.

The pictures represented hunting scenes in England, and the only familiar things were the stuffed heads of the various animals which adorned the cornices.

Molly stood tongue-tied in the midst of all this splendour, and her host's voice seemed to come from a remote distance to her ears when he spoke.

"I'm sure you are half frozen, Miss Osborne. Will you sit here near the fire while I run up and tell my aunt that you are here? She is expecting you," and the young man gently placed the bewildered girl in the settle which flanked the left side of the fireplace.

Molly obeyed like an unquestioning child, and made an extremely pretty picture as she sat in the glow of the firelight, her face still flushed with the wind, her eyes full of wonder, and stray curls peeping here and there from beneath her becoming hat.

Jimmy Minton looked back twice as he mounted the wide, softly carpeted staircase which led to the upper portion of the house.

"She's a peach, sure enough," he thought, with a very pleasurable glow of excitement.

He stopped when he reached the door of his aunt's room, and tapped lightly.

"Come in," a high, somewhat hard, voice called.

"Oh, is it you, Jimmy? Come and give me a kiss. You look so fresh and jolly."

The handsome woman who looked up from the novel that she was reading in an arm-chair by the fire offered a cool, still pretty cheek, which Jimmy Minton kissed with a certain careless affection. He and his aunt had always been good friends, especially since his father's death, for she had gone out of her way to be kind.

It was current gossip in several circles outside Mintonville that Audrey Minton was only waiting to get her daughter off her hands, when she intended to return to England, her native country, in order to make the society sensation that her soul had always coveted.

The bitterest moment of her life had been when her brother-in-law's will was read, in which she came in for what she considered a most paltry legacy. The fact that she and her young daughter had enjoyed a beautiful home for many years, and that, according to her brother-in-law's will, she was to continue to enjoy it for as long as she thought fit, did not weigh with her in the least.

Secretly, she was a bitterly disappointed woman. But the sight of Grace, her young daughter who was shooting up so rapidly, gave her a brilliant idea.

Jimmy was very fond of his cousin, and if they married, she would assuredly be able to get large sums of money out of her good-natured, easy-going nephew when she became his mother-in-law.

It was, therefore, quite easy of understanding

that Jimmy was encouraged to remain in Mintonville, where there was very little temptation in the way of marriageable girls of his own class.

"Has the girl come, dear?" enquired his aunt, infusing a great deal more warmth into her voice than she really felt.

Jimmy beamed upon his aunt.

"Yes, she's downstairs. Better give her a second to collect her thoughts," he said, remembering Molly's utter bewilderment.

Audrey Minton's brain worked like lightning. She had not always lived in a little Canadian backwater, for before handsome Tom Minton, who had been visiting England, had taken her heart by storm, and carried her off to Canada with him, she had been one of the smartest young women in society, and her married life had, if anything, added to her general astuteness and quickness of perception.

"The surest way to add zest to an undesirable love affair is to discourage it. The flame will burn itself out of its own accord if Jimmy is, so to speak, absolutely soaked in this girl's society. Of course, a girl who could be picked up in such a manner can hardly be the sweet innocent that he takes her for. She quite evidently knows her way about. And there is Grace to think of."

At that moment a light tap sounded upon the door.

"Can I come in, mother?"

It was a very fresh, girlish voice that asked the question with a boisterous note in it that told of intense vitality, love of outdoor sports and games —in fact, of everything healthy and open air.

Grace Minton did not wait for permission to enter her mother's room. She came in with a boyish stride, frank-eyed, pleasant-faced, and smooth-haired, just the type of jolly, unaffected girl that the best English schools aim at producing.

Grace Minton had been educated in England, and had not very long come home for good, but most of the time she had been running about with her cousin, and there was about as much sentiment between them as there is between a couple of schoolboys who are related to each other.

"Hullo, Grace? Anything doing?" was Jimmy's airy greeting to his cousin.

"Not much," replied Grace, in the free and easy manner that made most men her friends but none desire to be her lover.

"I say, Grace, I know you'll do something for me," said her cousin, his conscience pricking him, for Molly was waiting rather a long time for his aunt.

"Of course I will. Is it anything to do with the girl you told us you were bringing here for the night?" laughed Grace, looking him squarely in the eyes. She had inherited her mother's keenness of perception.

"Good girl! Right first time. Miss Osborne is downstairs in the hall, and it would make her feel more at home if a girl of her own age made friends first with her," said Jimmy, with unusual forethought.

Grace swung her way out of the room.

CHAPTER XI

A SOMEWHAT wistful, scared little expression was creeping into Molly's eyes, and a great longing for Jack, in spite of his apparent lack of warmth, came over her.

One moment, when she looked at her grand, unfamiliar surroundings, she felt sorry that she had come; but the next found her pulses leaping with exultation, for it was an adventure, and adventure was sweet to the girl whose life had hitherto been so barren.

Suddenly her thoughts were dissipated by the sound of a light, quick step upon the stair, and the next moment Molly found herself face to face with a blue-eyed, fresh-faced girl about a couple of years older than herself, dressed in a pale blue evening frock that Molly thought perfection.

"How do you do, Miss Osborne? Isn't it jolly cold?" Grace Minton spoke rather loudly, but cheerfully, and she used all the expressions common to the English boarding school in which she had received her education.

She was entirely unaware of the social standing of her cousin's guest, but, to her mind, Molly's distinguished beauty and well-cut, tasteful clothes spoke for themselves.

"Yes, it is very cold. I—er—oh, thank you

so very much for letting me have a room here to-night. I can pay for it, and I won't trouble you a single hour longer than I can help," said Molly, earnestly and gratefully, happily unaware that her offer of payment for her accommodation was little better than an insult.

Grace Minton looked frankly puzzled. What queer sort of girl had Jimmy picked up who spoke in this way?

"Well, it isn't my house, so you needn't thank me, and I shouldn't repeat your offer of payment, if you'll excuse me for mentioning it. Mother would be sure to misunderstand. But you'd better come up and take off your things," said Grace, in a kindly tone.

With a miserable feeling of having blundered, Molly followed the other girl up the wide, softly carpeted stairs, and even the little sick feeling at her heart could not take away her wonder that so much beauty could exist in a house.

Flowering plants stood on the landings, and beautiful coloured earthenware jars full of flowers—cultivated blooms that Molly, used only to the forest flowers, had never before beheld, stood on shelves, evidently designed to break the long expanse of wall at the side of the staircase.

In spite of Molly's curious opening remark, Grace Minton felt drawn towards her. The young Canadian was a creature of intense likes and dislikes, and very, very rarely was anybody able to remove a first impression.

"Come into my room for a bit, Miss Osborne. It's next door to yours, and I see that your fire

hasn't burned up very well," said Grace, half apologetically.

"Oh, please don't go to any trouble! I am used to the cold," said Molly, humbly. Her whole heart went out to the young girl, who was, she thought, the kindest creature of her own sex that she had ever met.

"This is my room. Not so dusty, is it?" said Grace, throwing open a door, and looking round the dainty, girlish apartment with very healthy satisfaction.

Molly was so overcome that she could hardly speak, but it seemed as if the other girl expected her to say something, so she said the first, and to her, the most obvious thing.

"I don't think that there is a speck of dust anywhere. It is very beautiful," she said, gravely.

Molly had not the faintest idea of the meaning of the slang which the girl with the English education used.

Grace Minton laughed, showing a very pretty set of white, even teeth as she did so.

"You are a funny girl! Anyone would think that you had never been in a house in all your life before," she said.

"I haven't," replied Molly, simply and truthfully, and she met the look of amazement on the other girl's face with a half-frightened look on her own, and began to wish that she had not spoken.

"Oh, please don't despise me because I've never been in a house like this before! You see, I come from a place where they mostly live in

rough shacks and shanties—Lone Pine Station, on the borders of the Great Slave River. I—I ran away from somebody I—I didn't like. But——" a winning smile lit up Molly's face as she added—"I do like you, and I want you to like me. Will you, please?"

Molly, with her little heart so hungry for love, looked so irresistibly appealing that, obeying a sudden impulse, Grace Minton took her in her arms and kissed her.

The unexpected caress brought such a rush of warmth and sweetness to Molly's heart that sudden tears sprang to her eyes as she said, "Thank you for being so good to me."

"There's half an hour yet to dinner, kiddie. Come and have a chat," said Grace, hospitably, drawing up a pretty chintz-covered arm-chair to the fire, and selecting a low stool for herself.

She was very interested in the curious but beautiful girl whom Jim had brought to Log House.

"Considering that you've lived all your life in the wilds, you speak very well. Who taught you?" said Grace Minton, after a pause.

"My mother—she was English," replied Molly, readily and a little proudly.

"Was she, indeed? What part did she come from?" asked Grace, interestedly.

"London," replied Molly, who had absolutely no idea of what the greatest city in the world was like, since her mother could never bear to speak much of the old days, when she was happy and free.

"Did she really come from London? Oh,

London's the finest city in all the world! Here, I've got a whole album filled with photos of London, taken in war-time. There's just time to show them to you if you'd like to see them," offered Grace, enthusiastically.

"Oh, thank you very much," said Molly, eagerly.

The Canadian girl went to a small bureau and took out a leather-bound album.

"This place is the Houses of Parliament, where all the laws are made; and this is Westminster Abbey." Her young face grew rigid, and her voice hard and implacable as steel as she said, pointing to a newspaper photograph which had been cut out and pasted in her album, "This is a picture of a street wrecked in the last air raid by the Germans. And this," turning over yet another page, "this is the photograph of a wonderful man—he's a V.C.—and I used to visit him in hospital in London."

Molly hardly heard a word after the turning of that page, for, smiling up at her in his own bright, kindly fashion was Jack Lorimer!

Sheer, absolute astonishment numbed the cry which rose to Molly's lips as her eyes took in the meaning of what she saw.

Above the portrait were the words, "Deathless Deed Wins Coveted Cross for Canadian."

Apparently the photograph had been taken at the investiture, and Jack wore the cross on his breast. Underneath were a few words stating that Jack was a native of Ontario, which was a mistake. Ontario was the city from which he joined the army.

But, after the first shock of surprise, such a thrill pulsed through Molly's proud little heart that she could not help saying, "That is my friend, Mr. Lorimer. It was to see him that I came to Mintonville. Oh, he's just splendid—the bravest man in all the world!"

A dead, dull silence followed Molly's enthusiastic words, broken only by the crackling of the logs as they roared up the chimney.

The album containing Jack's photo had fallen on the hearth-rug, and Grace Minton, with a great deal of the fresh, sunny youth faded from her face, was looking sulkily into the fire.

"You—you know Jack Lorimer?" she said at length, in a toneless, even voice, more as if she were fixing a fact in her own mind than asking a question of Molly.

Molly, who immediately felt the sudden chill in Grace's manner, said wonderingly, "Why, yes. I—I met him at Lone Pine Station, and he was very kind to me."

Suddenly, to Molly's utter astonishment, the young girl turned upon her with such fury in her face and voice that she shrank away from her, and through her whole being there passed the same horrible sickening revolt of feeling that had made her hate her stepfather so vehemently.

"What do you know about friendship, you, who have never, as you say, seen a house nor ridden in a train before to-day? Why, where have you lived that you could compare men? Until you know something of life, you can know nothing of men."

It was a strange speech to come from the lips

of a girl who had not yet reached her twentieth year, but there is nothing so old as youth when in the toils of love.

At the Canadian Hospital in Brighton, whither he had been sent to recover from his wounds, Jack Lorimer had received enough attention to turn the heads of six ordinary men. But there was a huge rugged simplicity about the young Canadian that made the people surrounding him seem like a lot of parrots in a den with a magnificent lion—their efforts to spoil him were so utterly futile as to seem ridiculous to an outsider.

Amongst the girls who visited him in hospital, bringing him more fruit, chocolates, and cigarettes than he could possibly consume, was Grace Minton. Shell-shock as well as his wound had rendered him deaf and dumb for a long time, and he had never discovered that the charming, sympathetic girl who visited him was the cousin of his employer, Jimmy Minton.

Grace had fallen head over heels in love, as the saying goes, with her handsome, modest young countryman, and though she knew, for the newspapers stated it, that he was only a humble miner in civil life, still she loved him, more passionately than ever, for, like most people who have never known the lack of money, Grace airily brushed financial considerations aside as an insult to true romance.

It had been a sore disappointment to her when Jack was suddenly given his discharge and shipped back to Canada.

Through an officer friend she was still making enquiries to find out what had become of him.

And here was this girl from the wilds of some little station on the Great Slave River saying that she was the friend of the man whose photo had been in every British newspaper, and whose deed of bravery had been on the lips of all!

Grace Minton looked with hard, unyielding eyes upon the little figure in the chintz-covered arm-chair, and Molly's beauty no longer struck her as being sweet and appealing.

"She's a quiet, sly little fox, and puts on all those baby airs to attract people," thought Grace, bitterly, and most uncharitably.

But there is no quarter to a foe where the stake fought for is a man, and it seemed as if a volcano could not melt the ice in Grace Minton's voice as she said, "That is the dinner bell, Miss Osborne. It is usual here to dress for dinner, but as there is now no time, you had better come down as you are."

Feeling utterly wretched, chilled, and downcast, wondering why her announcement should have made such a difference to Miss Minton, who had seemed at first so very kind—for, never having read novels, never having lived the life of town or city, Molly did not for a moment dream that this obviously rich, highly born girl was in love with Jack—Molly walked slowly down the stairs behind Grace's stiff blue silk back—Grace, who was now filled with unreasoning hatred and jealousy of the girl from the wilds who had already gained the friendship of the man she wanted for herself.

CHAPTER XII

BUT a glad light leaped into Molly's eyes, and a bright blush crept into her cheeks when she saw Jack standing on the hearth-rug, talking to his employer.

Immediately, something very big and gentle and kind—a great, enveloping calm which seemed to come straight from Jack to her—swept over Molly, and stilled the tumult of her troubled heart.

She had been through a very great deal that day, and was only just beginning to feel the strain of it.

At first, coming shyly into the room, she did not notice Jimmy Minton, nor the lady who was seated gracefully in an arm-chair smiling upon both men; she had only eyes for the handsome young giant who had to look down at his employer as he spoke.

After Molly was gone, Jack had been quite unable to rest. A long walk beneath the stars under the open sky had not restored the splendid poise of his calm, self-contained nature.

His heart was filled with a great hot unrest. He tramped all the way to Log House, almost running, so great was his eagerness to get there, and once there, he prowled about like some jungle animal in relentless pursuit of his prey.

He longed to go in and fetch Molly out again ; somehow—he laughed at the absurdity of the notion and called himself all kinds of hard and untrue names—he did not like leaving her there even for one night, although he was fully aware that there was nothing else to be done.

Then, as he was gazing up at the windows, wondering which room sheltered Molly, a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder, and the voice of the policeman who watched the house at night asked him what he was doing in the grounds, which were private.

He could not say to the big, bearded man, " I love every brick of Mr. Minton's house because it is sheltering the girl I love." That was the answer that was in the heart of the young miner ; but the answer that left his lips was, " I am not in the grounds for any bad purpose, you kin take it from me, and I'll go away right now, if it will please you. I'm one of Mr. Minton's men, by the way," added Jack, in order to completely satisfy his questioner.

" Are you ? Well, maybe Mr. Minton will tell me that himself," said the policeman, clutching hold of Jack with one hand and knocking loudly on the door with the other.

Thinking it better not to resist, Jack waited until his employer was fetched and then, in a few words, explained his presence in the grounds of his house.

" I—I only jest wanted to make sure that Miss Osborne had got here all right," sa'd Jack, awkwardly.

" You can go. It's quite all right," said

Jimmy Minton to the policeman. "Poor devil! He's got it pretty badly!" thought the young mine-owner.

Aloud he said, with that easy, impulsive generosity that made him such a favourite with everybody, "Er—stay and have a bite of supper with us, Lorimer. You'll be able to see for yourself that Miss Osborne is all right. She'll be pleased too," he added, feeling that he was being very generous indeed.

If he had not felt rewarded by the gratitude in the young miner's eyes when he made the suggestion he would not have been human.

An invitation to a meal at his master's table would not have been a source of great joy to Jack in the ordinary way—he would most certainly have found some excuse for getting out of it—but to-night it meant seeing Molly, probably sitting next to her, and the thought was a foretaste of heaven!

"Aunt, this is Mr. Lorimer, who is a friend of Miss Osborne," said Jimmy Minton, entering the dining-room along with Jack.

A smile of relief spread like sunshine over Audrey Minton's troubled face.

She was quite prepared to be charming to her nephew's employé, although, if she had been asked to sit down to dinner with him in the ordinary way she would have done so with a very bad grace.

But she was very gracious in this instance, even recalling the fact that Jack must have been fighting at the same time as her nephew.

They were talking about the war—Jimmy

Minton had received a bad internal wound in Mesopotamia—when the door opened to admit Grace and Molly.

The young miner certainly saw his employer's cousin—the girl who had been so good to him in London; only his eyes, inward and outward, were filled with the sight of her companion, but the next instant he turned them away, for the red blood began racing to his head, pounding against his heart, almost driving him mad.

With the sure, subtle instinct of the lover, he immediately divined that Molly was unhappy, and he clenched his hard fists in sullen, helpless rage because he had not the means to offer her a shelter to which she would have the greatest right that this world knows—the right of love.

Grace had seen the swift rush of blood to Jack Lorimer's cheeks, and she knew the meaning of the sudden light that had kindled in his eyes. It was not for her—she was bitterly aware of that—but she meant to do all that she possibly could to make the lovelight shine for her some day.

With a pretty air of proprietorship, Grace went forward, hand outstretched and her face beamed the welcome that she so sincerely felt.

"It is the queerest possible thing to find out that you live in this part of Canada, Mr. Lorimer. I—I had no idea that you were one of my cousin's 'boys,' as he calls them. Mr. Lorimer is a V.C., you know," said Grace, proudly, turning her flushed, charming face towards her mother and cousin.

The effect of the announcement upon Jack was to make him blush until his face was bright crimson; and Molly, with quick intuition, flashed him a sympathetic glance which, even in his acute misery, the young ex-soldier noticed.

Mrs. Minton said, "How perfectly splendid!" with rather laboured enthusiasm, for she had not followed the progress of the war that had seemed so very remote, and privately thought it a little presumptuous of her nephew's employé to return from Europe with a decoration, when his young master had none.

But Jimmy Minton was honestly, genuinely enthusiastic. He had been through the worst horrors of Mesopotamia, and had heard stories, at first hand, of the carnage in France and Flanders; he knew what the winning of a V.C. meant.

"Old man, I'm proud to shake," he said, putting out his hand with a bright smile and a new light in his eyes.

The two men gripped, and the bond which was then cemented between them—that of men who had suffered and dared common dangers and comm[illegible]hardships—made the young mine-owner's subsequent actions inhumanly hard in view of the struggles that ensued with his own better nature.

"I was out in Mesopotamia when that list of V.C.'s was published, and only by chance got hold of a newspaper containing it. There was no portrait of you in this one, and I was under the impression that the Jack Lorimer mentioned was a native of Ontario," said Jimmy Minton,

slowly, but with very evident delight that his impression was a wrong one.

It was only with the utmost difficulty that an extremely bald account of the action that had won Jack the coveted honour was dragged out of him while they were all seated at dinner.

Only his employer knew what lay behind the halting, bashful words, and Molly, with her quick imagination and ready sympathy, sensed something of what the young mine-owner knew; Mrs. Minton privately thought the whole story rather tame and a little boring, while Grace had no ears for the unassuming recital; all her attention was for the man who was giving it.

The little excitement covered some of the embarrassment that both Jack and Molly felt in being guests at a properly appointed table for the first time in their lives.

Jack was in worse plight than Molly, next to whom he sat. When Molly's mother was alive, she had at least told her daughter about the existence of such things as her widely opened eyes now beheld for the first time; but Jack had only seen them from afar in London; never had he been called upon to use such an array of table implements as were now before him.

Women are always quicker than men to take on the colour of their surroundings. After a swift preliminary glance, Molly managed quite nicely, and Jack very pointedly waited until she had commenced so that he could see what she did.

Once he caught Mrs. Minton looking at him in an amused, slightly contemptuous manner,

and then the lines of his face hardened, while into his eyes came that ageless, determined look that his mates out in France had known so well.

There was a wistfulness and a yearning in the glance that he directed towards Molly, and his thoughts leapt forward and bridged the time that must elapse before he could offer her such a home as this.

Meantime, as his young employé ate, Jimmy Minton struggled to subdue the voice of his better nature, which was bidding him give rein to the generous impulses that persisted in sweeping into his heart.

Probably the greatest truism known to man, and the one with which he is most in sympathy is the one which says, "All's fair in love and war."

If anybody had asked Jack Lorimer's employer, point-blank, "Are you in love with this girl who is sheltering beneath your roof?" he would have replied, with a laugh, "How can I, when I scarcely know her?" which would have been true, if love depended upon such things as time or place, poverty or wealth.

But, at the very bed-rock of his nature, there lurked the determination—perhaps not yet fully realised—to let nothing and nobody come in the way of winning sweet Molly Osborne for his bride.

He was fighting the generous, kindly inclination to show his admiration for Jack Lorimer in some practical way. He did not have the courage to put it to himself in that bald fashion, which stated that if the young miner were possessed of

a substantial sum of money he could make Molly his wife, and thus destroy his own chances of wooing her.

What he said was, "He's the kind of chap who'd simply hate a fuss—anybody can see that. The winning of the V.C. is all that matters."

As the meal progressed through the various courses, both Molly and Jack Lorimer became more at ease, due in a great measure to the pains which Mrs. Minton took to be charming to them both.

She was quick to read the love which the young couple had for each other, and every moment as it passed added to the contentment of her mind.

Like most mothers who send their children away to school at a very early age, Mrs. Minton knew little or nothing of her daughter, beyond the outside husk of her bodily charms; of her thoughts, and ideals, and hopes she was utterly ignorant.

Grace had sense enough to know that she was in no way a match for her beautiful little rival so far as looks were concerned. But she was foolish enough to fling her relationship to Jimmy Minton, and her superior education and social standing into the scale where the handsome young miner was concerned.

As a matter of fact, Grace was supremely confident of herself, and with the facility of the girl very much in love, she precipitated her mind into the future, when she would have won her lover.

"I'll get him to consent to a secret marriage,

for, of course, mother and Jimmy will oppose it if they know about it beforehand. Then when Jimmy sees that it can't be undone, I'll coax him into giving Jack a post as manager of one of the mines."

So thought Molly's rival as she smiled sweetly into the steady blue eyes of the man who sat opposite to her at the dinner table; the soft glow in Grace's cheeks and her manner of looking at Jack when she spoke caused the passion which is as old as the world itself to take root in Molly's staunch, loving little heart—that of jealousy, keen-edged and cruel!

But with Molly there was no malice intermixed with her very natural feeling of resentment against her rival.

She looked at the other girl's pretty clothes and soft white hands, at her face, which she thought to be much prettier than her own, and she listened to the amazing flow of easy, bright conversation which she kept up so successfully.

Seeing and hearing, Molly became very, very humble, and did her utmost to crush the feeling of jealousy, telling herself that she was a wicked, ungrateful girl, and that to-morrow, or at most the following day, she would pass out of the lives of every one of the people around her, including Jack, who was probably very annoyed that she had held him to his promise of calling upon him.

Dinner finished, Mrs. Minton led the way to the prettily furnished drawing-room and, anxious to shine in front of the man she loved, Grace sat herself down at the piano and played, very correctly, but stiffly, a classical piece with a

great many runs and trills that she had learned at her fashionable boarding school.

The young miner listened attentively enough, and his eyes never left the slender, blue-clad back of the young player, but her daintiness of person and skill in playing only served to make him think wistfully, "How I'd like to give Molly a piano of her own, and dresses that would match a room such as this!"

Molly, observing the direction of Jack Lorimer's steady gaze, felt her heart grow heavy.

But a moment of great triumph was at hand for her and for the man who loved her so blindly and passionately; a moment which sent Jack's spirits soaring to the clouds with pride in Molly's great natural gifts.

More from politeness than anything else, Jimmy Minton, turning to Molly, asked, "Do you play, or sing, Miss Osborne?"

A little smile of contempt, which nobody observed as her face was turned away from them, curled Grace Minton's lips at the words.

"What on earth is Jimmy thinking of in asking that little backwoods creature such a question!" she thought.

But, to her surprise and to the surprise of her cousin, Molly answered with a sweet simplicity that the latter found very refreshing, "I can sing, but I am not able to play. I used to sing in Mr. Gaspard's saloon for his customers. If you would like me to, I will also dance for you."

In any other girl but Molly—a city-bred girl, for example—the offer to display her accomplishments might have sounded forward and pushing;

but it sounded exactly as Molly meant her offer to sound—as if she felt under an obligation to her kind host and hostess to entertain them to the very best of her ability.

Immediately there came a look of interest on all the faces in that Canadian drawing-room, but it was more than mere interest on Jack Lorimer's countenance; it wore such a look of deathless love, mingled with pride, that, had she but seen it, Molly would have had no further doubt as to his feelings towards her.

"We shall be delighted to hear you sing, Miss Osborne. Is there anything here that you know?" asked Jimmy Minton, rising and taking a pile of music from the top of the piano.

"I know this one—it is my favourite song," said Molly, delightedly, selecting a somewhat tattered song from the bundle.

Jimmy Minton bent his sleek, dark head and looked over Molly's shoulder. His forehead almost touched her raven curls, and the young miner felt an overpowering desire to grip the slighter man by the shoulder and pull him back, away from the girl he loved and wanted above everything else on earth.

"I'll play the accompaniment for you. I always do when Grace sings it. It's 'Bonnie Mary,'" he said, turning for a moment to his aunt before he sat down to the piano.

Mrs. Minton smiled and nodded graciously. She had often heard Grace sing the sweet old Scotch song in her well-trained cold soprano voice. She did not expect much from this girl of the wilds.

As Jimmy Minton ran his fingers easily and lightly over the keys, Jack Lorimer bit his firm red underlip with dull unreasoning anger. Life seemed a monstrous futility, an unfair game in which all the prizes went to those who already held the highest stakes.

But he checked his bitter thoughts directly Molly opened her little red mouth and started to sing—he had to, for the surpassing beauty of her rendering of the old Scotch ballad made him temporarily blind and deaf to all else.

"I have heard the mavis singing his love song to the morn,
I have seen the dewdrops clinging to the rose just newly born."

Mrs. Minton dropped the piece of embroidery that she was working, and stared with all her might at the exquisite face of the little singer as she carolled forth her song.

If he had not known the accompaniment off by heart, Jimmy Minton could not have played it, for his whole being was held in thrall by Molly's singing; he knew that, given a proper chance, she would become a very great singer indeed, for the soul of the artist, as well as the voice, was there.

When the fresh young voice ceased, there was complete silence in the room for a few seconds.

Molly flushed sensitively, thinking that perhaps she had not given pleasure to anybody but herself, for she was hardly ever conscious of her audience when she was singing.

But she was reassured when Jimmy Minton and his aunt congratulated her warmly on her

beautiful voice, and said that it certainly should be trained.

She looked timidly in Jack Lorimer's direction, for like Grace he had not spoken a word; but he was sitting stolidly in his chair, his splendid head sunk forward a little on his chest, and Molly could not know the bitter, hopeless longing, the passionate, heart-whole love that was eating into the very soul of the man. He would get on, yes —Jack Lorimer meant to move heaven and earth to do that—but the future was a dim, nebulous thing, and anything might happen before he was able to go to Molly with something in his hands and say, "See, I have won all this for you, because I love you and want you to be my wife." It was his employer's voice that broke in upon the blackness of his thoughts.

"Didn't you say that you danced, Miss Osborne? Have you ever had any lessons?"

"No, there was nobody to teach dancing in Lone Pine Station," laughed Molly, her eyes sparkling with amusement, and a little excitement as well. "I just danced when I felt like it in the forest sometimes, that was all," she finished modestly.

"I say, it's ages since I saw any dancing. I know it's no good attempting anything in here, but we've got a good big greenery at the back of the house where there's plenty of floor space. We have hops there ourselves sometimes," said Jimmy Minton, eagerly.

Molly's little success had intoxicated her, had mounted to her head as wine would have done. Her face flushed, her eyes sparkled, and her whole

appearance was so dangerously alluring that Mrs. Minton hastened to say, "Jimmy, dear, I am afraid that you are asking too much of Miss Osborne. She must be very tired indeed, and it was kind of her to sing to us. You cannot expect her to dance to-night."

Quick to feel what others were thinking, Molly drew back, rather like a little, eager, loving child who has been severely snubbed.

"I—my dancing wouldn't please you, Mr. Minton. Indeed, it is not good dancing, at all, only I love it," said the young girl, humbly, all the joy of her little triumph gone from her face.

But Jimmy Minton had a very particular reason for wanting to see Molly dance. While her glorious voice had been thrilling his heart and charming his ears, an idea had come to him which made all the blood in his body rush singing to his head, and he meant to put it into execution if he could.

The young mine-owner was a more than ordinarily rich young man, and his temperament was romantic to a degree. There was something exciting and to his mind rather noble in playing the part of benefactor to a beautiful young girl, bringing her out as a great artiste, and perhaps—this was the most romantic part of the whole story—being something more than a benefactor in time.

Jimmy Minton did not attempt to disguise from himself the fact that his interest in Molly would give him a big pull over her, for, reading her nature aright, he knew her to be capable of intense gratitude, and it would be extremely

gratifying to him to create a little sensation by making his protégée, who would then be famous as well as beautiful, his wife.

These latter dreams were the merest shadows at the back of his mind, but, all the same, they were there, when he asked so eagerly for a dance.

Raising himself, as if by a great effort, Jack Lorimer spoke.

"Mrs. Minton's quite right, Mr. Jim. The girl's tired, and the best place for her is bed."

Molly flushed, for Jack spoke as if she had been a wayward little child; but beneath the girlish resentment, there was a feeling of sweet satisfaction to know that he was so concerned about her.

Jimmy Minton looked ruffled and annoyed.

"Everybody seems to know what Miss Osborne feels like far better than she does herself. What do *you* say, Miss Osborne?" he asked, turning to Molly with a smile.

"I—I think I'd like to go to bed, please," said Molly, quietly and shyly.

"Quite right, my dear. Grace shall take you up at once," said Mrs. Minton, briskly, rising as she spoke.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK LORIMER was not fortunate enough to get himself invited to dinner at the Log House on the following evening. Even if the invitation had been forthcoming, he could not have accepted, unless Jimmy Minton had specially intervened to get his working hours changed. It was the young miner's turn for the night shift.

By rights, he should have been resting in bed during the day so as to conserve his strength for his work at night. But the furious love fever which tore like a blizzard through the fabric of the young miner's life would not let him rest.

It dominated, possessed, scorched him, and rest was utterly and entirely impossible. Directly after breakfast he was out and tramping up the long hill which led to his employer's house.

He did not hope for a sight of Molly—he scarcely knew what he hoped or expected—but when, after hanging about for two hours, he saw her, looking as fresh and sweet as a rose, come out of the house, escorted by Jimmy Minton to his motor-car, he cursed himself for having come, and cursed his poverty which tied his hands and kept silent his eager tongue.

He felt a blind, insensate rage take possession of him when he saw his employer tuck the fur

rug cosily around the glowing, lovely girl, who thanked him with a smile that—to Jack Lorimer —was by far too sweet.

"He'll win her, before I've even a dog's chance!" he muttered, with a little groan that seemed torn from the very depths of his jealous, aching heart.

He was hanging about, too unsettled to go back to his lodgings and yet hating himself for staying, when Grace, looking very fresh and charming in a big white blanket coat with huge, glossy black furs, suddenly overtook him in his seventh aimless walk around the house, and demanded to know where he was going, at the same time holding out her hand with a winning smile.

"How is it that you are free at this time of the day? Have you got a little holiday?" she asked, in an interested, flattering tone.

Jack Lorimer, holding the little soft hand in his big paw for a moment, shook his head, while the bright, sunny smile that was more often than not on his face broke through its unusual gloom.

"I'm free because I'm on a night shift this week, Miss Minton. Holidays don't come my way very often," he said, a little note of bitterness creeping into his voice as he thought of the man whose life was one long holiday, who was at present seated beside and talking to the sweetest girl that the whole world held.

"Has—has Miss Osborne gone away for good? I saw her go this morning in the car with Mr. Minton," stammered Jack, at length, forcing his laggard tongue to obey the dictates of his heart.

A little hard, frozen look crept into the eyes of the young girl who listened.

"Oh, no, she hasn't gone for good, Mr. Lorimer. My cousin at breakfast proposed that he should take her to a very celebrated singing master who is on holiday in the Ozark Valley to see if her voice is worth training. They will be coming back to dinner."

Grace Minton paused, to see the effect of her words.

Jack Lorimer's handsome face clouded as if some invisible hand had wiped out all the youth and joy of living from it. His voice was a little hoarse as he asked the question which, naturally, sprung to his mind.

"Who—who'll pay for the training of her voice if it's worth it? She ain't got folks to do it for her, you know, Miss Minton," he said.

With true feminine cunning, Grace sped her shaft home straight to the spot where she knew it would hurt the most.

"My cousin intends to, I believe. He is a great admirer of art, and he—well, he has taken a great fancy to Miss Osborne, I might as well tell you," she said, in an apparently careless tone.

"Yes . . . I see. . . . I—I'll be going back for a bit of dinner and a sleep, Miss Minton," said the young, hopeless lover, after a heavy silence.

But Grace laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"No, you won't go without lunch, Mr. Lorimer. I—er—in fact, I think that my mother wants to see you," she said, quite truthfully, for, indeed, Mrs. Minton had asked Jimmy

to give the young miner a second invitation to the Log House; but Jimmy had not thought fit to fall in with the idea.

He declined so positively to extend the young miner a second invitation that his aunt looked up sharply and scrutinised her nephew's face with lynx-like eyes.

What she saw entirely destroyed the happy security that had been hers the previous evening.

"Something has got to be done and quickly, or Jimmy will marry this little backwoods creature in front of my very face," Audrey Minton told herself bitterly.

It was over an hour before any solution of the problem came. But, like a flash of lightning cleaving through massed clouds, the way suddenly opened itself for her.

"They are in love with each other at present, and I expect it is lack of money and prospects that keeps the man from declaring it," she mused, thoughtfully.

When Grace brought the subject of her thoughts triumphantly in to luncheon, she greeted him so charmingly and made him feel so much at home that Jack found himself admiring the sweet-mannered woman more than any other he had ever met—leaving out Molly, of course.

Audrey Minton meant it to be so. With the skilfulness of a woman bent upon achieving a certain object, she flattered and sympathised with Jack until when they were alone, seated by the library fire, she thought her time had come.

"Mr. Lorimer, forgive me for speaking of such an intimate matter on so slight an acquaint-

anceship, but I am getting on to that age when a romance is a precious thing to behold."

She gave a little affected sigh and looked down at her carefully tended hands, half expecting her young listener to make the obvious retort that, for her, that age must yet be far off.

But Jack Lorimer was not a "lady's man"; he had few, if any, drawing-room attributes, and he just remained silent in that cosy, book-lined room, though it lent itself most seductively to intimate conversation.

"Lout!" thought Audrey Minton, impatiently.

However, she easily conquered her feelings, and, looking up with a charming smile, went on talking in the low, sweet voice that was one of her chief assets.

"It is impossible for the young to hide the fact when they are in love, Mr. Lorimer, and it is so easy to see that you and sweet little Miss Osborne love one another."

Jack Lorimer started, and the colour surged in great hot waves to his very hair-roots. The charming woman opposite to him leaned forward, and in her white fingers was a slip of paper.

"Mr. Lorimer, I know how difficult it must be to save up a few shillings at a time in order to get married. You—you have done your duty so nobly in the war that I should feel it an honour if you would accept a little present from me. Here it is," and the white fingers laid the slip of paper on Jack Lorimer's knee.

Jack felt the room swinging round him and he saw Mrs. Minton's pretty mouth open and shut,

and he knew that she was speaking; but he could not hear what she was saying.

His eyes were staring at the slip of paper on his knee, which was a cheque for two hundred pounds.

"I am more pleased than I can say to do this for you."

Mrs. Minton spoke grandly, condescendingly, like one to whom philanthropy is a hobby and not the outcome of a passionate love and pity for fellow-creatures less fortunate.

She leaned back in her comfortable arm-chair and took a keen satisfaction in studying the handsome young features, with the straight, glancing blue eyes that were staring so fixedly at her cheque for two hundred pounds.

But, because she was artificial and clinging to a degree, and knew not the meaning of the hardier virtues such as independence, joy of attainment, and hatred of patronage, she could not sense the struggle that was going on in the soul of the man before her.

Mrs. Minton's cheque would open the gates of an earthly paradise for him; it would furnish a tiny home and even leave a little for a possible rainy day, and there would be no limit to his struggles for advancement, no height that he could not scale with Molly at his side to spur him on.

It almost took his breath away even to contemplate it.

The two most primitive passions in the heart of man—love and jealousy—were at war with one another. It was only too evident to his

eyes that his employer wanted Molly, and it was quite within the bounds of possibility that, young and inexperienced as she was, she would be temporarily dazzled by all that he could offer her.

It did not for a moment occur to the big, simple-hearted, loving fellow that Molly might not love him in return.

He had been so used all his life to overcoming apparently hopeless obstacles that, knowing his own need of Molly to be so great, he just said to himself, "If I love her like this, so much that I would steal, ay, and murder for her sake, then surely that love must awaken some response in her! Besides, we were meant to mate," and with that he was content.

No other girl had ever caused him a single quickened heart-beat. He was bringing to the altar of his love an austere purity and strength that is seldom found in the men who inhabit big towns and cities.

Then, with the all-engulfing force of a tidal wave, realisation of what the acceptance of Mrs. Minton's offer would mean swept over him.

Jack Lorimer came of a long line of pioneers—splendid, silent, rugged men who hewed and hacked their way through the unknown, uncivilised spots of the earth so that others might benefit by their labours, while their womenfolk followed their lead, just as brave, just as silent and uncomplaining as they.

Jack himself had been born in a rough shack far north of the mighty Yukon when the land was one blinding, endless vista of snow, and the

north rarely breeds sons whose will is flaccid and whose power to conquer is weak.

The ageless look that indicated so little and meant so much crept into Jack Lorimer's eyes as he sat there, looking into the future with Molly that might be his if he wished.

Even before he admitted it to himself, before he had spoken a single word to the confident, smiling woman opposite to him, he knew that it could not be; the spirit of his forefathers was too strong in him to allow him to kill that mighty independence and self-reliance that was the very bed-rock on which their characters had been built.

"Every time I saw my girl at home, I would feel a mean sneaking hound because I had not bought the chairs and tables and cups and saucers and other things that we would use. I want Molly to owe everything—everything in life that makes her happy—to me and to nobody else on this earth."

The young miner's square chin became even squarer, and his lips became a thin, very determined red line as this essentially masculine resolve took definite shape in his brain.

He was quiet for so long that Mrs. Minton began to grow restive.

"Surely the fellow must be slow-witted if he hasn't realised my offer by now," she thought, as she tapped her smartly shod foot impatiently on the floor.

But it was more than impatience that darkened her face and caused her hard blue eyes to flash when, holding out the cheque towards her, Jack

Lorimer said, with the simple courtesy that would have made him equally welcome in a mansion as a cottage, "It is the kindest action that has ever been done me, Mrs. Minton; but —but I couldn't take money for doing something that was just what any other fellow would have done. Indeed, the V.C. was won thousands of times in one day, only it was just luck that my particular action was singled out."

"I wasn't thinking so much of the V.C. as that girl you are so fond of. You want to marry her, don't you?" asked Mrs. Minton, brusquely and imperatively, all the charm gone out of her voice and manner.

A rueful little smile lit up Jack's face.

"I do—more than anything on this earth I want to marry Molly—but I want to give her everything myself," he said, doggedly.

Mrs. Minton gave vent to a very slight but unmistakable sniff. If he had been more versed in femininity, Jack would have known better than to have sought to make an ally of the thoroughly annoyed woman. But he was not woman-wise, and it struck him quite suddenly that Mrs. Minton must possess a heart of gold to wish to be so kind to one of her nephew's employés.

There was a quietly unconscious pathos in the appeal that the young man made, as he got up and stood before Audrey Minton.

"Forgive me for speaking just what's in my mind, Mrs. Minton, but I reckon your nephew is after my girl, and——" A moment's hesitation, then Jack went on boldly. "He's got the

pull over me in every way, and he might win her in a twink, so to speak."

What Jack was about to ask Mrs. Minton to do was never translated into speech, for, unable to control herself any longer, she rose, and with a brow like thunder, said icily, "My nephew is not in the least likely to fall in love with Miss Osborne, just because he has gratified a whim of his own and taken her to have her voice tested. She—er—she is a chance acquaintance, picked up in a most unusual manner, and is not of his own class. I expect that the hospitality of Log House will not be extended over to-morrow, at the very latest. If you will excuse me, Mr. Lorimer, I am very busy," and, instructing a servant to show the surprised, crestfallen and angry young miner out, his hostess, unable to control herself any longer, walked out of the room.

Audrey Minton went straight up to the room that she called her boudoir, and, actually rendered physically weak with the tumult of anger that was shaking her, she lay down to rest upon her bed.

Jack, fiercely determined that, whichever way it was managed, Molly should leave the shelter of his employer's roof on the morrow, turned his steps, not towards home, but to the mine, where he offered to do an extra shift—the one that started at four o'clock.

He had wisely chosen the best and most efficacious remedy for all earthly ills—work.

After a short, sharp struggle, during which Jimmy Minton's aunt told herself that the thought of his marrying the wild, uncultured

little nobody from the backwoods—which was how she designated Molly in the small, mean mind which was only big enough to hold herself and her own personal interests—was futilely, ridiculously impossible, she summoned a servant and told her to ask Grace to come to her at once.

Grace was busy in the garden, but she came immediately. She wore an old skirt and jersey and her face had a set, determined expression, as if she had resorted to the same antidote for suffering as Jack Lorimer.

Her mother glanced at her disapprovingly.

"For goodness sake put on a more becoming frock and do your best to look a little brighter. Whatever's the matter with you?" sitting up on one elbow and surveying the sulky, disinterested face more critically.

The young girl looked at the picture above her mother's head and did not trouble even to answer.

When at length she spoke, it was about Jack Lorimer.

"Has he—Mr. Lorimer—gone, mother?" she said, hurrying over the name of the man she loved, lest, by dwelling too long upon it, she betrayed her secret.

A hostile, angry light, came into her mother's eyes.

"Yes, he has gone, the great, ignorant, unthankful lout, and I hope that we've seen the last of him. If Jimmy insists upon keeping that girl whom he picked up from the street at Log House, I shall refuse to stop here," she said,

with so much venom in her voice that Grace stared at her in frank surprise.

"Whatever has he done, mother? You are right about the girl—she's an artful, sly little fox, and knows what she's about; but Mr. Lorimer is—is—splendid!"

Her eyes were shining; a bright pink flush made her smooth cheeks beautiful, and her whole being was vivified by the inward force of her love.

If she had been less preoccupied, Audrey Minton would have noted and undoubtedly acted upon these danger signals. But she was too full of her own fancied slight to notice, and she poured the story of Jack's ingratitude into her daughter's pain-sharpened ears, fully expecting to be sympathised with at its conclusion.

But, instead, Grace asked a question, in a hoarse somewhat choked little voice that made even her mother glance sharply at her.

"Did—did he actually say that he was in love with Molly Osborne? Does she know?"

"If you had heard him, you would not have doubted his love—he is one of those big, simple creatures, with the obstinacy of a mule and the strength of an ox who reaches his goal just because there is nobody strong enough to stop him."

If she had known that every word was like a little dagger thrust in her child's worshipping heart, the angry woman on the bed would have dilated still further on the constancy and obstinacy of Jack Lorimer's character, so as to have driven her words home the more deeply.

The bright, pretty colour drained slowly out of Grace's cheeks, and the light left her blue eyes, leaving her face heavy and unattractive, as before.

"And the girl?" she persisted.

There was no time for a reply, for a mad scampering of feet sounded outside the door, and hardly waiting to knock, a servant rushed into the room with white, scared face, and lips that trembled so that she could hardly speak.

"Oh, ma'am, can you tell me where Mr. Minton has gone? There's—there's been a terrible accident at the mine, and the manager has sent to ask where he is."

Mrs. Minton sprang from the bed, galvanised into activity by the news.

"Which mine is it, and what has happened?" she asked, hurriedly, preparing to go downstairs.

"It's the big copper mine, and the shaft has fallen right in, and all the poor fellows are imprisoned," almost sobbed the servant.

It has often been said that those who love greatly are vouchsafed warning when disaster threatens the beloved.

Although she knew, for he had himself told her, that Jack Lorimer was not due at the mine until ten o'clock that night, yet such an overwhelming premonition of evil came to her that she could not rest until she satisfied herself that he was safe.

So, while her mother was still making agitated enquiries of the messenger, Grace Minton saddled her horse and rode off at a furious gallop down the long hill which led to her cousin's mine.

She had to pass Lower Point Road on her way, and like a flash it occurred to her to enquire at Jack's lodgings if he were safe. The unusualness of this course did not strike her for a moment as she reined up and knocked at the low wooden door.

"No, Jack Lorimer ain't in, miss, but he met my Bonny an hour ago, and said he was working an extra shift," said Mrs. Timber, who opened it, and who had not, apparently, yet heard of the accident.

A hand, with fingers of cold steel, seemed to clutch and pull at her heart, draining it of every vestige of hope and feeling.

"Dead! Dead!" The word seemed to whisper in her ear at one moment, and thunder the next.

Whatever faults Grace Minton possessed, lack of the power of loving was not amongst them. She loved Jack Lorimer with all the more fierceness and ardour because he was not, apparently, for her.

On she sped like the wind to the spot where the big copper mine was situated.

As she got nearer to it she met many white-faced, frightened women, some of whom were weeping, while others clutched little whimpering, red-eyed children by the hand, whom they tried in vain to console.

"Who—who are the men that are imprisoned? How many are there? No, my cousin is not following. He has gone into the country for the day, but he will be back to-night. Tell me, who are the men?" cried Grace, with a face whiter,

if that were possible, than those of the hushed, stricken women around her, and they, misinterpreting her anxiety, since she had nobody of her own buried in the bowels of the black, treacherous earth, thought how sympathetic she was.

The manager, who was here, there, and everywhere, shouting directions to the reserve party at one moment, and taking a hand himself in the work the next, fumbled in his pocket and produced a strip of paper, which he handed to her, bidding her to be careful of it.

With hands that were tremulous and icy cold, and lips that refused to keep steady, Grace read down the list of names.

"Jinks, Maycroft, Weldon. . . ." She traced them down with a shaking forefinger, and was almost ready to let joy flood her thankful heart, when, coming with the force of a hammer blow, even though it was feared and half-expected, she saw Jack Lorimer's name, the last on the list, as an "extra man."

CHAPTER XIV

MOLLY indulged in the rosiest of rosy daydreams as she leaned back in Jimmy Minton's luxurious motor-car, letting the wind work its will with her hair, and thoroughly enjoying the whole adventure, with the healthy, happy enjoyment and forgetfulness of past events, which is the inalienable heritage of youth.

A night's rest had done wonders for her, and Jimmy Minton, stealing side-glances at her when she was looking in the opposite direction, felt his pulses beat like sledge-hammers, and he told himself, ecstatically and quite seriously, that at last he loved, that all his past flirtations were as water to wine or a rushlight to the golden glare of the noonday sun, compared with this mighty avalanche of feeling, which had come so suddenly to beautify and enrich his somewhat aimless life.

He told himself many wholly delightful things, made a great number of promises which he honestly intended to keep, since he was by no means a worthless young fellow, but his was a more ordinary nature than that of his rival. He had every worldly advantage and could easily have declared his love, but he wanted the joy of first making Molly into a celebrity, and then he wanted to step in and claim her for

his own; whereas his young employé, whose love was an altogether bigger, absolutely selfless thing, only thought of Molly's comfort and well-being, and would feel madly jealous if the public claimed even a tiny share of his heart's idol.

"Enjoying the drive?" Jimmy Minton asked, turning to glance full into the rosy, child-like, eager face.

Molly's eyes shone; her whole countenance beamed with joy, and in it was that to which no man has yet been able to give a name, but it is the expression which belongs to all who are good with that larger goodness that redeems the world from sin and sorrow.

Jimmy Minton, who had kissed and flirted with dozens of girls in his time, suddenly felt a desire to abase himself before this fresh, sweet blossom of girlhood. Certainly he could not attempt even the mildest flirtation with a girl who seemed not to know the meaning of the word.

Their way lay through two townships, separated from each other by wild, mountainous stretches of land, snow-covered for the most part, with roughly made roads that in some places were hardly motorable.

"Don't get frightened, but hold on for all you are worth. We are nearly at Oakham, where we get a train which takes us within three miles of the mountain valley in which old Jasper Ling chooses to live when he has made enough for the year in New York."

Jimmy Minton thought to interest his protégée by introducing the subject of the eccentric,

though famous, singer to whom he was taking her. He had purposely kept Jasper Ling's well-known story for the drive, because he had hoped to entertain her with it.

But it was a particularly troublesome piece of road, and so Molly's unexpected silence passed.

If Jimmy Minton had not been so much engaged he would have seen Molly start and grow pale as a snowdrop; all the vivid colour left her happy little face, and even her lips were drained of their rich red.

"Oakham!" She repeated the name to herself two or three times, and she fancied herself back once more in the rough little lean-to of a waiting-room, having a meal with the man whom she had promised to marry; and then his drunken sleep, and the long, frightening journey, and Jack's mixed reception when she arrived at Mintonville.

Her way had at first seemed so dark and uncertain, but now there was a definite prospect before her.

It had not occurred to Molly that Jimmy Minton intended paying for her musical education; she had an idea that she would be able to serve the professor in some way; or else work and pay for her tuition herself. Poor, ignorant Molly had not the haziest notion of what lessons from the great Jasper Ling would cost.

And now Oakham, the town in which her wedding was to have taken place, came into the bright picture of her future, like an unhappy augury of trouble!

If Molly could have foreseen the tragedy

towards which she was driving in such luxuriousness, she would have jumped from the car and made her way on foot across the snow-clad mountains which could be seen from a distance, and have escaped while yet there was time.

But no warning reached the little backwoods girl, and while the man who would have died for her was fighting for his life in impenetrable, airless darkness, Molly was heading straight for the disaster which subsequently filled with misery the lives of at least four people.

"I'll leave the car here with the station-master and enquire how long the train will be," said Jimmy Minton, with a light, happy laugh, as they drove up to the tiny wayside station.

Molly got out, trembling with fear which she could not help feeling, although, from her careful look around, there was not a soul in sight.

Jimmy Minton helped to put the car safely under the shed, and then, while they waited for the train, the jovial Canadian railwayman chatted to them, making enquiries about the young mine-owner's wound, and giving news of his son's progress towards recovery, who, it seemed, was in a Canadian hospital in England.

"So you are going to Misty Valley to see old Jasper Ling? He's a funny old fellow, with his notion of living nine months in the mountains and then going to America for three to get the biggest screw for his singing that ever a man has got in the United States. From hereabouts, missy?" asked the old fellow, kindly, more from a wish not to leave Molly out of the

conversation than because he really wanted to know.

"Oh, no, I come from Lone Pine Station, on the Great Slave River," replied Molly, with a little blush which both men thought entrancing.

The old railwayman was not too ancient to appreciate a pretty face, and he kept Molly talking as long as he possibly could. In fact, he followed the young couple to their compartment and gave them each a hearty handshake before parting.

Molly felt a greater sense of security when they were on their way to Misty Valley, and in her relief she laughed and talked with such gaiety that her companion felt himself more utterly her slave than before.

But Molly would have lost herself for ever in the mists which gave Misty Valley its name if she could have overheard a conversation which took place in the little waiting-room at Oakham just an hour after she and Jimmy Minton left—that is, when the train from the station nearest to Lone Pine came crawling slowly in.

Only three passengers alighted, one of them being a tall, good-looking man, whose striking features were marred by the results of very recent dissipation. The stranger was Dick Earle, who had, since he missed the last train to Oakham the previous day, been obliged to lodge for the night with the hospitable railwayman whose bottle of whisky was responsible for Molly's escape.

He could get no information whatsoever about her; the man had not seen her depart, and there

was no telegraph nor telephone system to aid him in his search for his missing bride. He knew that she would never return to her stepfather, and since he could assign no reason for her strange disappearance—unless it was that he did not choose to run the risk of being killed by the bear which they had encountered on their journey—he thought it just possible that she had obtained a lodging for herself somewhere in the place, leaving him to have his sleep out.

He made exhaustive enquiries, but Oakham was only a small place, where a stranger excited comment, and anybody so striking as the girl he described would have been instantly remarked.

"Maybe she's gone on to explain why the wedding didn't take place yesterday," volunteered the railwayman, at length, as a bright, hitherto unthought-of solution to the problem of Molly's disappearance.

Knowing her peculiar ignorance and shyness, it did not strike Dick Earle as at all likely that Molly would do such a thing; but, with the knowledge of all that was at stake, any suggestion seemed worth following, and anyway he could do no good by stopping at Lone Pine Station.

So it came about that Molly's deserted bridegroom interviewed the very man who had been admiring her only an hour before, and he fell enthusiastically into every trap that Dick Earle set for him.

"Yes, that was the little lady, sure enough, sonny. Your gal, you say? Well, she seemed at home like with Mr. Minton, the big mine-owner way out to Mintonville. She sure did," and the

old man bit the end of his pipe with a certain relish. So few things happened at the little wayside station to break the monotony of his existence.

"Where've they gone? Where did they take tickets to?" demanded Dick Earle, abruptly.

He was cursing himself furiously for having let Molly slip through his fingers in such a ridiculous fashion. The mention of another man filled him with keen, jealous anxiety, for it seemed as if Molly had found a powerful friend, somebody to whom she would probably appeal for help, and if so, she might refuse, even yet, to become his wife. And so much—his whole future—depended upon making her go through that ceremony!

"Do you know where they are bound for, in this place known as Misty Valley?" he asked, after a pause, during which his informer had done some hard thinking.

"I don't know, sonny. It is a big place, this same Misty Valley. You'd do no good by follerin' of 'em there, 'cause there ain't another train till it's nearly time for them to be coming back. But why don't yer take the carrier's cart into Mintonville, where young Mr. Minton lives, and have it out quiet like? He'll be coming back ter-night, I think."

The old man suddenly thought that it might do him a great deal of harm in the wealthy young mine-owner's eyes if he gave away his destination. So far he had only answered enquiries, and anybody might have done that.

"Where does this fellow—Minton—live in

Mintonville ? " asked the impatient, disappointed bridegroom, after a further and longer pause.

" Log House—mighty big place on a hill. Anyone'll tell yer. Jim the carrier's jest a-coming, so if yer want to go you'd best hoof it down to meet him," and, making a cup of both his hands, he sent a loud shout down the long, uneven road to warn the driver that he was required to stop.

Still inwardly cursing, Dick Earle clambered into the seat beside the fur-wrapped carrier, and drove away in the direction of Mintonville.

CHAPTER XV

MOLLY looked silently at the great solemn Ozarks, and somehow the towering mountains in their gigantic size brought Jack Lorimer to her mind. He had just the same suggestion of illimitable strength, but he was not grim and cruel looking, as were these snow-capped monsters that lowered against a dark, wintry sky. There was something sinister and terrorising about these mighty peaks, but Jack would never frighten the weakest, most helpless person. Rather, there was a snug little feeling that it was only fitting and right to be weaker than such a man as he, for it would be so sweet to claim his protection and care.

Jimmy Minton was taking the tenderest care of his beautiful little companion, helping her over the rough places in the trail that led to the white house in the valley with the most punctilious courtesy.

Misty Valley was one of the wildest, most eerily beautiful spots in the whole of Canada. It ran between two mountain ranges, and the air was never free from the blue, clinging mist which invested everything, even the sheep grazing on the luxuriant grass, with a mystic beauty that was as striking as it was unforgettable.

Spruce, pines, and magnificent redwoods

formed a beautiful forest, and the resinous odour of the pines hung in the air and delighted Molly, who had planted pine trees over her mother's grave because she loved their dark, whispering beauty so well.

On a slight eminence, commanding a wonderful view of the forest, with the snow-capped mountains beyond, stood a one-storied, red-gabled house, looking like a shining ruby in the midst of so much whiteness, for the snow lay thick around them for miles.

Molly thought it the most charming home that she had ever seen; not magnificent, like Log House, which, to her unsophisticated mind, was like a king's palace, but—in her heart she confessed it—more homelike and sweet than the one in which Jimmy Minton lived.

"That's Jasper Ling's house. He is content to live there with an old negro servant, month in and month out, hardly ever seeing a soul, and not wanting to, either. If his fashionable friends in New York or Chicago knew his hiding-place, I believe they'd follow him even here. But I'm the only one who knows about it, and I can come whenever I like, because it was once in my power to do his son—who's been killed, by the way, in this iniquitous war—a little kindness."

They were walking all the time that Jimmy Minton was talking, and Molly did not know that her companion was trying to prevent her from having time to be nervous.

The musician had had the very finest builders to erect this little forest home of his. A verandah

ran the entire length of the house, and roses that in summer-time would be in bloom climbed up and around the four big posts of golden oak that supported it.

The door was opened by a giant negro whose dignified bearing and kindly cast of countenance robbed Molly of all emotion save that of liking.

"How do you do, Leo? Is Massa Ling in?" asked Jimmy, greeting his friend's servant, cheerfully.

The old negro made a low stately bow and answered, "Yes, sir," at the same time motioning them to follow him into a room which was so beautiful that Molly stood still on the threshold, with the wonder-filled eyes of a child.

The floor was stained black and on it were a few rare white rugs.

On the walls were the loveliest, most appealing pictures that she had ever seen. She did not know that every one was a masterpiece, jealously guarded, the result of a whole life's searching.

The view from the wide, low window almost made her want to cry with the exquisiteness of its beauty. She felt her throat tighten and something sting her eyes.

Molly had the soul and the temperament of a very great artist indeed, and she could not help the poignant effect that beauty, in all its forms, had upon her.

Some traces of her emotion still showed in the vivid, quick-changing expression of her face, and in the deep glow of her wide grey eyes when the door opened and Jasper Ling, the most famous singer throughout America, appeared.

He was old, but in another sense he was as young, and even younger than Molly herself, for he had that most rare and precious of all gifts—the child heart that sees the years pass with perfect serenity, for it knows that it holds within itself the secret of fadeless youth.

The old singer was tall, ruddy-cheeked from his wanderings in the forest and on the mountain sides, and his speaking voice was like a chord of exquisite music, before even he lifted it in song.

Molly felt a deep, respectful love that was almost homage go forth from her own young heart to greet the tenderness which rose at once in that of the old man for her.

"You shall sing a little for me when we have lunched," said Jasper Ling, kindly, when he heard the object of Molly's visit.

"She's a regular tip-topper, sir! If only you'll give her a few tips, she'll make a big hit on the stage," prophesied Jimmy Minton, eagerly, in the slang which had London in every word.

The old man looked keenly and searchingly into Molly's flower-like little face, just now quiet and serious, and his words, when he replied, had in them something of sadness.

"Miss Osborne, if I read her aright, has much to learn from the world before she can give back to it those messages of love and solace for all its misery that alone makes a singer's life worth while. Nobody," and the old man rose from his seat looking like some grand patriarch of old as he finished, in his soft, though booming voice, "nobody can sing with their heart—and that is

all, all that matters—until they have suffered, and sorrowed—and wept."

Old Jasper Ling sat down heavily in a deeply padded arm-chair, and by the expression of his mobile face, it was clear that he was in a world apart from his two young guests, for the time being.

"Don't let on. He's a bit cranky, but he's a dear, harmless enough old lunatic," whispered Jimmy Minton, with an encouraging pat on Molly's arm.

But his reassurance was quite unnecessary. Molly read the heart of the old man by the fire with the quick, intuitive sympathy which was natural to her, and she felt vaguely annoyed, though she could not have told why, at her companion's lack of understanding.

She had further cause, if not for annoyance, at least for great alarm when, later on in the afternoon, they all three went to view some particularly lovely spot in the valley, and Jimmy Minton slipped, spraining his ankle rather badly.

"I'm not so much concerned for myself, though it's beastly unlucky, coming just now; but who's going to take Miss Osborne home? The car's at Oakham, and there's a fellow I know in the town who'll drive her to Mintonville for me if anybody could go with her the first part of the journey," said the young mine-owner, solicitously.

"I will myself take the little bird with the golden voice to Oakham," said Jasper Ling, who had been charmed with Molly's singing, and who had readily undertaken the training of her voice.

So Molly, with every vestige of fear banished from her excited, happy little heart, was escorted back to the town in which she was to have been married by one of the leading lights of the New York operatic season.

He saw her into the big grey car and parted from her as courteously as he had only a week previously parted from the best-known woman in New York.

Dick Earle did not enter Molly's mind during the whole drive back to Mintonville, and when she went up to Mrs. Minton's boudoir, without taking off her outdoor things, in order to give her the various messages that her nephew had sent, she stood transfixed on the threshold, for, sitting opposite to the woman whose unwelcome guest she was, was the man whom she had promised to marry—Dick Earle!

Molly was silent with sheer amazement and terror. The beautiful woman with the cold face and unsympathetic, questioning eyes seemed to be mocking her agony of mind and soul.

Dick Earle rose with an easy grace and came towards the little, white-faced, shrinking figure in the doorway with a reproachful smile on his lips.

"I have had a great deal of trouble finding you, Molly. Why did you run away from me—from me, of all people in the world? Come and give me a kiss, little foolish child that you are," and the suave voice softened to an even deeper note of tenderness.

But Molly, with a look of terror in her grey eyes, shrank away, and put forth both her little

appealing hands, as if to ward off the caress that was coming.

"I—I can't m-marry you, Mr. Earle. I don't want to. I'd rather not, thank you," she stammered, hardly knowing what she said, but her words sounded so childishly simple that any other woman but Audrey Minton, listening to them, would have undoubtedly read the young heart aright, and given all the help that lay in her power.

But there was no such thought in the mind of the mistress of Log House. She was seething with what she considered a most just anger against the girl whom she had been forced, against her will, to shelter.

"Excuse me, Miss Osborne, but I am afraid that, under the circumstances, I cannot allow you to stay here, and I would be most obliged if you would kindly leave with your future husband at once. Your portmanteau has been packed and brought down here," and Mrs. Minton pointed imperiously to the brand new suit-case which the men and women of Lone Pine Station had given her, and which stood all ready in a corner.

Molly's lips quivered piteously, and she looked helplessly, like a little hunted, frightened animal, from one pair of hard, cold eyes to the other. She longed with every ounce of feeling she possessed for Jack Lorimer, who would surely know what she ought to do.

The thought of her champion brought a glad, eager little rush of hope to her heart.

She turned appealing eyes upon Mrs. Minton.

"May I send a message, or go myself to Mr.

Lorimer? I would like to see him, because he will be able to advise me," she said, with a certain quiet resolution in her voice and manner that both startled and made a little uneasy the man and the woman who, for their own separate reasons, wanted to work their will upon the little, frail, lonely creature who stood facing them.

Dick Earle ventured to lay his hand upon Molly's shoulder, and it trembled beneath his touch.

Though he was furiously angry, he managed to infuse a note of soft persuasiveness into his voice as he said, "I think that you must have had a sudden attack of some kind, that led you to run away from me, your lover. Come, darling," and very gently, he placed his arm around Molly's waist, and tried to lead her towards the door.

But, with sudden strength, Molly shook him off.

"I *will* see Mr. Lorimer, if I wish, and I will not be forced into a marriage that I do not desire. I am very ignorant, because I have not had a chance to learn things like other girls, but even I know that men cannot, in these days, force girls into marriage."

Molly broke off, breathless. How she had got the strength and the courage to speak out and defy the sneering, supercilious woman and the man whom she now so heartily despised, she did not know; but in reality, it was the courage of the hunted creature at bay, who, the weaker it is, the stronger it becomes when forced to stand and fight or else die.

Dick Earle paused irresolutely, and his brow darkened. Molly's defiant attitude was as baffling as it was unexpected. He did not, and could not know of the revulsion of feeling which his own conduct had wrought in the heart of the young girl who had out of gratitude promised to marry him.

He had fully expected to find Molly frightened, eager, and thoroughly glad to see him again.

Who was Jack Lorimer, anyway? Was he another friend as powerful as Jimmy Minton, the young mine-owner, whom he had thought to meet?

But while he paused, wondering how best to meet this new and unlooked-for display of character on Molly's part, Mrs. Minton rushed in and dealt without mercy the soul-sickening blow which blotted out the sunlight from Molly's life for many, many weary months, and made her often long for the silent forgetfulness and peace of the grave.

"It is impossible for you to see Mr. Lorimer. Neither you, nor anybody else, will ever see him again, I am sorry to say," said Audrey Minton in what she hoped was a sincerely regretful tone.

She was only speaking from a report which the manager had warned her was not as yet to be taken as official. Some of the poor fellows had been recovered, and one of them resembled the young V.C. hero, but it was impossible to say until a full number of men were accounted for.

But, because a certainty suited her purpose so much better than an implied doubt, the hard-

hearted, self-seeking woman stated Jack Lorimer's death as a fact.

Molly did not faint nor cry out with the shock of the news which laid her heart as bare of feeling as a slab of ice-cold marble. She was dumb. She could not yet realise that Jack, with his warm, sunshiny smile and strong, resolute heart, was gone for ever from her life, and from the world, and that never, never would she again see him.

These facts beat themselves into her brain, but not into her understanding so that she could grasp them.

"Jack dead, did you say, Mrs. Minton? He —he isn't!"

The contradiction was flat.

The chilly manner in which Mrs. Minton replied betrayed her annoyance that her word should be doubted.

"I am sorry that the information is correct, Miss Osborne. An accident occurred in the big copper mine early this afternoon, and Mr. Lorimer's body has been identified. That is why I am so anxious for my nephew's return."

"He—he gave me this note for you," said Molly, dully, as she fumbled in her coat pocket and drew out a letter.

With the delivery of the letter which had been entrusted to her care, all reason for Molly's existence seemed to vanish. Her faculties became numb, and when, once again, Dick Earle put his arm around her, she allowed him to lead her downstairs without a word of protest, and she got into Jimmy Minton's other car, which his

aunt had said Dick Earle might have in order to drive to Oakham, as docilely as a little child.

There was a grim smile on the man's lips as he tucked the rug cosily around the little cold body, and before he took the wheel he pulled out the licence for the marriage which should have taken place the day before, and read it by the glare of the headlights.

"You don't elude me a second time, my little beauty!" he muttered, jumping into his seat, and setting the car in motion.

CHAPTER XVI

THE car seemed to eat up the long, rough road between Mintonville and Oakham at a most alarming rate. The man at the wheel, with passion smouldering in his eyes and his lips set in curves of fixed decision, drove with almost criminal recklessness, considering the precious burden that he carried.

He knew the Registrar's house at Oakham, a little brick building set on the banks of a small river at the other end of the town.

He had to make the distance before eleven, or he would have to wait till next day to be married. As a steamer sailed for England the next morning, he was almost feverish with anxiety to get everything settled so that they could leave by it.

The stars that pierced the indigo blueness of the sky seemed to mock at the misery of the still, whitefaced little creature in the swiftly moving car, who was too stunned to rally her strength in order to defy the man at her side.

Molly stole a look at the pale, handsome face, and the muscular form that bulked so hugely in the cold, clear moonlight, and she found herself thinking firstly that it was Jack sitting there, strong and calm, and then the face and form changed into that of Jimmy Minton, and

she was still wondering how the change had come about when her weary little head fell back against the cushions, and, yielding herself to the arms of Nature, mother of all mothers, she slept.

Dick Earle looked aside once and gave a grunt of satisfaction when he saw that Molly's eyes were closed and that her rigid little form had relaxed in her corner.

But he drove on madly, crashing through portions of forest undergrowth when he lost his way, and once he almost steered into a river, by which he knew that he was nearly at his journey's end.

Molly was still sleeping when she was helped with more force than politeness from the car, and Dick Earle, holding her arm tightly, said, with an attempt at jocularity, "Two will go into this funny little house, but only one will come out."

With her white, drawn face, pitiful eyes and disordered hair Molly surely was the unhappiest, sorriest little figure that had ever walked up the grassy path to the Registrar's house on the arm of a man.

After a swift look at her, Dick Earle seemed to sense something of the unusualness of it all, for he said, almost irritably, "Don't look as if it's your funeral you are going to, Molly! After all, even if you are not madly in love with me, it is better to marry me than to go back to Big Jim Carter to be knocked about as he likes. Isn't it now?"

The words were entirely reasonable, as far as

they went, but Molly hardly heard them. She walked by his side as one in a dream.

They knocked on the door of the ugly little red-brick house, and it was opened by a half-breed—a huge fellow with a dark, discontented, evil face, who was holding a meat sandwich in his hand. Evidently he had been disturbed at his supper.

"Mr. Raeburn in? I'm Mr. Richard Earle, and hold a special marriage licence. I am sorry to disturb you all so late at night, but we are anxious to catch the steamer for England to-morrow morning."

As he spoke, Dick Earl thrust a crackling note into the half-breed's palm, which caused the slanting, narrow, dark eyes to glitter.

"Mr. Raeburn him wait in for you an' de lady all de day, for sure. He just inside right enough," and the dirty thumb was cocked in the direction of a door at the end of a passage, which Molly noticed was slightly open.

"He's expecting us, is he? All right. I'll settle the preliminaries while you are finishing supper," said Molly's bridegroom, jauntily, as the half-breed disappeared through the door which led to his own quarters.

Dick Earle offered Molly his arm.

"Come along, darling. It'll only take a few minutes, and I've got the ring ready," he said, with a smile that was meant to be reassuring.

But Molly drew back, for the fresh breeze, blowing straight from the river which flowed almost at their feet, had revived and quickened her brain.

"I don't want to be married to you," she began, but her protests were cut short by a rough push and an impatient, muttered oath from her companion. Time was passing. All Dick Earle's surface polish faded, and only the brutish, self-seeking commoner remained.

"Do as you are told, and remember that I've got you and don't mean to let you slip again. If you so much as utter a single word of protest to the Registrar, I'll——" And without finishing his sentence Dick Earle half pushed and half carried Molly to the door of the room indicated by the half-breed driver.

After the most perfunctory knock upon the oak panels, they entered a long, low, somewhat bare room, lit by two large oil-lamps, one of which stood in the middle of a big deal table littered with papers and piled with ledgers.

A man, with his back turned towards them, was seated at a smaller side table, and apparently he had fallen asleep, for his grey head was on his outstretched arms, and to Molly's eyes he presented a somewhat pitiable figure of helpless old age, lying there, so quietly sleeping.

"Old fool!" muttered Dick Earle angrily, as, letting go of Molly's arm, he crossed to the little table and shook the sleeping man.

"Mr. Raeburn—wake up, please!" he bawled in his ear; but the man never stirred, and when he was roughly shaken, his head fell on one side and remained where it fell.

Molly caught a glimpse of the old man's face, and something in its expression struck a chill to the very core of her heart; but, even while

the chill gripped her, the thought crossed her mind that the marriage could not possibly take place, even if she wished it.

"He is dead—look at his face!" Molly said in a quiet but strained voice, indicating the lined old face from which the life had fled.

"The devil he is!" exclaimed Dick Earle, rapidly taking a small mirror from his waistcoat pocket and holding it in front of the cold, slightly blue lips.

The polished surface did not dim. Molly was quite right. The old man was dead. It looked like heart disease.

"Hi! Where are you?" shouted Dick Earle, in a passionate temper, striding to the door, leaving Molly staring dazedly at the huddled figure in the chair with the cold, lifeless face.

The half-breed, alarmed, came rushing into the room, and he took in the situation with all the quick wit and philosophy of his race.

"Him good man," he said, as he made the Sign of the Cross and mumbled some prayers on a string of glass beads that he took from his pocket. "Mr. Brownlow, he in other office. I go fetch him," said the man, making for the door.

But Dick Earle, who had been thinking rapidly and forcefully, stopped him.

"Stay here with this lady. I'll go and find Mr. Brownlow," he said, and the next moment he had gone, leaving Molly alone with the grinning half-breed and the dead man.

There was no chance of escape, even if Molly had wanted to try, for the man who had been

set to watch her was a huge fellow, and he planted himself against the door, so as to get as far away from his dead master as possible.

Dick Earle had not far to seek for Joe Browlow, the laziest and most worthless remittance man in Oakham.

He sometimes dropped in to help the old Registrar, who was a dozen other things as well, with his work, when funds were low and all his credit exhausted. He was the very man for the job that he was ultimately persuaded to undertake for twenty pounds, which, at that moment, was a fortune. He would have sold his soul for much less if it had been saleable.

"I've brought my girl here all the way from Lone Pine Station, and to-morrow the steamer sails for England. We can't go unless we are married, for you know what the people on board would say," commenced Dick Earle, in a deprecatory, ingratiating fashion.

"Of course. Deuced hard on the little lady. What do you want me to do, old man?" was Joe Browlow's reply, in unmistakably English tones.

Dick coughed uneasily.

"Well, if you could—er—read the service in place of the old man who's dead, and—er—sign the certificate as a witness, well, it could be entered in the books, and as far as the girl will know everything will be all serene. Of course, I'll make it worth your while," concluded Dick Earle, the ex-convict and instinctive criminal.

Joe Brownlow looked a little dubious. He was a thoroughly well-educated individual—nobody

could have been better suited for the job—but he was not over eager.

"It's a bit rotten for the girl, who won't be legally married, and if I did—if, I say, mind you, —I wouldn't make the forged entries in the books, nor sign the certificate, except as a witness," he said, slowly and emphatically.

"Oh, that doesn't matter! I can attend to that part of it all right," interrupted Dick Earle, eagerly, only too glad to have got any kind of agreement to his villainous plot. Some instinct warned him that, if once Molly were allowed to leave Oakham unmarried, he would never again be able to get her as far as a Registrar's office.

"You'll have to get the half-breed, who's the servant here, to act as the other witness, and you'll have to let him into it and square him as well. By the way, he talks French better than English. Understand it?" asked Brownlow, abruptly. His weak face was interested, and Dick Earle could see that he was on the point of yielding.

"I'll make it twenty pounds for you and ten for the half-breed," he said, recklessly.

The mention of his reward settled the question for Brownlow.

"After all, it won't hurt the girl; for he'd be too much afraid to wriggle out of the knot, after his own share in the tying of it," argued the remittance man, giving a sop to what he was pleased to call his conscience.

The pair went back to the horribly quiet room which held the beautiful young girl, the half-breed, and the dead man.

Molly was staring fixedly at the huddled-up figure, and any doctor, noting her white strained face and unnaturally bright eyes, would have prescribed a sleeping draught at once in order to avoid trouble.

But the men who were all in league against the little lonely girl whose life had always been so hard and joyless saw nothing of these symptoms. Their only thought, collectively and separately, was for the gold which, through her, would be theirs.

Brownlow called the servant to one side, and spoke to him in rapid French, a language which, of course, Molly did not understand.

"I find that this poor old man is not the Registrar, but a clerk who sometimes helps with the books. The young man who has just come in is the Registrar, and when they take the body away, he will perform the ceremony for us, darling. I am so very sorry that this should happen on our wedding night," said Dick Earle, lying glibly, but looking uneasily into the deathly pale face of his unwilling bride.

Molly's head suddenly started to ache violently, and the room began to revolve slowly around the disc of light which was made by the oil-lamp upon the table.

Brighter and brighter grew the disc, faster and faster the room revolved; the walls seemed to be coming nearer and nearer, walking towards her like living things. She put out a protesting hand to thrust them back, and Molly felt somebody catch it and hold it tightly for a second. As if from another world—a sphere in which she

had neither lot nor part—she heard a man's voice saying, "Do you take this man to be your wedded husband?"

"No! No! No!" Molly shrieked the words in her brain, but they never passed her lips. The muscles of her throat seemed suddenly to be made of iron, and she could not articulate a sound.

Dick Earle shook her savagely and thrust a pen into her cold shaking hand.

"Write your name here," he said, in a fierce, threatening voice, and because the half-fainting, almost unconscious girl was too terrified to do anything but obey, she wrote her name in shaky, uneven letters on the form that Joe Brownlow pushed across the table to them.

"She doesn't seem well," said the remittance man, who was already more than half ashamed of himself for mumbling the brief marriage service, which was not legally binding, over the white-faced girl. In his nervousness he had hardly waited for her answers to the necessary questions, and could not honestly have told whether Molly had or had not replied.

"She is very far from well, and has had a most trying day," was Dick Earle's entirely truthful reply as Molly fell in a dead faint at his feet.

Joe Brownlow was not entirely bad, and if he had not possessed so keen an appreciation of the charms of the weaker sex he might not have been a remittance man.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Earle is poorly," he said, using the title out of courtesy and not ironically, as Dick Earle strongly suspected. "My little

shack is only half a mile down the road, and as you can't leave till morning you are welcome to its very limited comforts for to-night. I shall have to stay here, anyway, but it will take you some time to practise poor old Raeburn's writing sufficiently well for it to pass as his own in the books—not that they'll ever be examined, of course," added the remittance man, confidently, without the smallest knowledge of what lay behind the mock ceremony that he had been induced to perform.

"We'd better take her along in the car before I start, then. Is there a woman in your place?" asked Dick Earle, anxiously, for something in Molly's face tugged hard at what he was pleased to term his heart.

The emotion that he really felt was that of fear —fear in case that Molly should die.

"No, there isn't a woman, nor anybody there. But she'll sleep if she's placed comfortably on the bed. The girl's dead beat—that's what's wrong with her," said Joe Brownlow as he opened the door for Dick Earle, who held Molly in his arms, to pass through.

LIBRARY
OF THE
BOMBAY
BRANCH
OF THE
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CHAPTER XVII

MOLLY came up slowly from the well of inky darkness into which she seemed to have plunged and gasped as she sat up on Joe Brownlow's bed.

At first the surroundings seemed familiar, and she thought that she was back in her stepfather's shack, and that it was time to get up and commence the day.

But a candle, stuck in the neck of a bottle and placed on a table in the middle of the floor, flickered on something bright—something which shone on the hand which hung loosely over the side of the bed.

For the moment it conveyed nothing to her, but presently, as Molly lay quietly in the remittance man's rude cabin, every little detail of the scene in the Registrar's office came back to her freshened mind.

Then, as she pieced events together, realisation of what the plain gold band on her finger meant came to her, came with a shock which caused her to leap from the bed, and to stand, a horrified, dishevelled little figure, in the middle of the floor, gazing at her left hand with wide, terror-filled eyes.

"I remember signing the marriage certificate, and the Registrar reading the service. I meant

to tell him that I didn't want to be married, but I couldn't—all the room was swimming, and the words wouldn't come! And marriage is for ever, mother always said—for ever, unless one or the other of the parties died!"

The ring seemed to burn into the little cold finger, and Molly wrenched it off, flinging it on the floor, as far away as she possibly could. It rolled into a corner, and Molly sat down on the one chair that the shack contained and watched it with unnatural light in her beautiful grey eyes.

"I am married, and marriage is for ever." seemed to be printed on the rough pine walls and all over the surface of the table on which her elbow leaned.

It was hardly to be wondered at that Molly, in her almost total ignorance of life, and the laws which govern mankind, presumed that she was legally married and that the man whom she now feared and hated, as well as despised, was her legal husband, the man to whom she must yield implicit obedience in all things.

Molly looked despairingly around the remittance man's cabin, and noticed, for the first time, that her suit-case had been placed beside the bed. A handbag belonging to the man whom she believed to be her husband was also there, showing that he meant to come back and spend the night.

A shiver of cold, impotent dread shook Molly from head to foot.

"I—I can't stay here with him," she murmured with dry, cracked lips.

Just like a person who walks during the progress of a troubled dream, Molly stumbled towards the door. It was locked.

Next she opened the window as far as it would go, and found that she could with difficulty wriggle through the opening, and it was then an easy matter to drop a few inches to the ground.

The little cabin was built almost on the river bank, and the bright moonlight revealed the black waters, swirling with the force of the current that carried everything out to sea in such an incredibly short space of time.

Molly was incapable of coherent or sustained thought, but every instinct that she possessed revolted against staying in the shack for Dick Earle to find and to enforce his power over her.

But something made her draw back when she heard men's voices break the stillness of the quiet night, and heard heavy footsteps coming along the trail.

Obeying the blind impulse which suddenly took possession of her, Molly raced back to the bed at the far end of the shack, and, pulling the clothes up around her and turning her face to the wall, pretended to be fast asleep when, a minute later, Dick Earle and the remittance man entered.

"She's still asleep. She'll probably sleep till morning. Well, I'm sorry to have to drag you away for another half hour or so, but you'll have to come back and explain how you found poor old Raeburn, and that you want to catch the steamer early in the morning. There won't be any fuss—Canada isn't England, you know."

The remittance man broke off with a laugh

and, taking a bottle from the shelf beneath the window, handed it first to Dick Earle, who drank deeply, and then took a long draught himself.

"That's better," he said, in a satisfied tone, as he replaced the cork in the bottle, and followed Dick Earle out into the night, leaving Molly trembling with relief and gladness when she found that they had left the door unfastened.

Something in a bottle stood on the shelf beneath the window, and a cup beside it.

Molly did not know what it was—it might easily have been poison—but she was so thirsty that she did not stop to think. She poured a little of the liquid into the cup and drank it off. It proved to be brandy, and the fiery spirit raced along her veins, melting the ice with which they seemed to be filled, causing her brain to work with lightning-like rapidity and crystal clearness.

The ardent desire to escape formed itself into a determination to do so, but, with her mind working so clearly, Molly saw at once the futility of just rushing into the darkness, and hiding in the forest, where she would probably meet some of the hungry wolves which the blazing fires kept away from the outskirts, and if this simply followed the road along the river's course she would be overtaken in ten minutes by her husband in the car.

It was a little green, *suède*-bound book lying open on the table that presently suggested a plan to the desperate girl.

Joe Brownlow possessed many little intimate relics of his former life that, greedy for gold as he was, he would never part with, even if, as was

highly improbable, he could have sold them in a country which had but little use for the impractical things of life.

Strangely enough, the remittance man had a great love for poetry, and many an hour was spent lying on his rude cabin bed dipping into his favourites.

He had been reading Swinburne just before setting out to put in an evening at the Registrar's office, and the book had been left open at the place where he had left off.

Molly did not know who Swinburne was, but while she was thinking with every ounce of the fictitious energy that the brandy had endowed her with, her eyes fell upon four lines which caused her to jump up and put the idea which they suggested into instant execution.

> "No life lives for ever,
> Dead men rise up never,
> And even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea."

Molly looked once again at the lines. The poet had furnished the way out. Life with Dick Earle would be a monstrous, intolerable thing.

"Dead men rise up never."

Molly glowed with gratitude to the author for giving her the idea.

With hasty, feverish fingers Molly undid the strap which went round her suit-case, and fumbled amongst the contents, turning over the pretty garments that the men and women of Lone Pine Station had bought for her, until she came to the little old skirt and the grey woollen jersey

that she had been used to wear when she lived with her stepfather.

She laughed softly, and blessed the strange impulse that had caused her to pack the ugly insignificant garments along with her brave new finery.

"But some day I will look at them and they will remind me of the dark portion of my life, and so help me to keep humble and thankful to my husband for rescuing me from them," Molly had said, on the night before she had left Lone Pine Station, before Love had sung to her with so loud and unmistakable a voice that her marriage without it had come to seem a crime.

But, in spite of all, she was married, and now her only wish was to escape from the man who had forced her into it.

Hastily undressing, Molly donned the old skirt and grey jersey once again, and then, making a bundle of the clothes she had been wearing, carried them out with her to the river-bank.

She placed them in a little heap on the grassy slope, and fastened a note to the topmost garment which read, "I have chosen this way out rather than live with you. Molly."

Then, scrambling up the bank, Molly started to run, and she ran with her heart torn with fear from her body, for she heard the two men returning to the shack.

CHAPTER XVIII

EVIDENTLY Dick Earle and his new-found friend had no intentions of going into the shack just yet, for they lingered, smoking and talking, outside in the open, while, not five yards away from them, crouched the little, terrified, unwilling bride, not hearing a word that the two men uttered, only her rigid lips were framing noiseless prayers that the conversation might continue until she had time to steal further away from the shack.

It was Molly's salvation that the man to whom she imagined herself married should have a very decided objection to allowing the owner of the shack inside it again that night. His soul was aflame with passionate longing, and like a child who preserves the biggest sweet for the end of the feast, Dick Earle was postponing the moment for joining his beautiful bride. But he wanted to keep her for his own eyes, and so he purposely discussed every detail that it was necessary to discuss with Joe Brownlow out in the open.

Meanwhile, hidden from sight by a thick clump of pines, Molly began her highly dangerous task of escaping by striking boldly into the thick undergrowth which surrounded the shack. It was lucky that she was thoroughly familiar with all phases of wild life, or the little harmless

creatures that scuttled fearfully across her path as even her light careful footsteps reached their timid ears, would have startled her into involuntary exclamations of fright, and her whole plan, on which so much depended, would have been upset.

Once, when a larger shape than usual appeared to stalk her, and a pair of bright, fierce eyes glared into hers for a moment, Molly turned sick with fear; but she kept her magnificent courage, and tried the usual expedient of sharply snapping a twig, with the result that the creature, far more frightened than she, made off in the opposite direction.

"If only I can get far enough away before he discovers my absence!" breathed the overwrought girl, as her excited fancy imagined voices and footsteps that seemed to be pursuing her.

As a matter of fact, the blowing of the wind in the right direction revealed that Molly's fancy was no trick of her imagination.

"Molly! Molly!" she heard her name called repeatedly, over and over again, in her husband's voice, and her heart almost stopped beating.

Then there fell upon Molly's ears the long, distant howl and staccato bark of the prairie wolf, and the lonely voice of the Wild West around her struck a fresh chill to the sound of the poor, lonely, frightened girl who was little more than a child, facing the grim realities, the elemental things of life.

But, with her trained ear, Molly could judge

fairly well the distance of the animals ; but not so Dick Earle, who, discovering that the shack was empty, and not yet having come across Molly's pitiful little bundle of clothing on the river-bank, took it for granted that she would make for the forest and try to hide herself.

With passionate anger consuming him, he felt for his revolver, and started to trample down the thick undergrowth, calling Molly's name in a loud, commanding voice as he did so.

But suddenly the long, low, terrifying howl which had made Molly uneasy struck sheer terror, like cold iron, into his cowardly soul.

A little harmless forest animal swung from a tree near by and fastened upon his shoulder. With a yell of horror, thinking that the wolves were even then close upon him, he rushed back to the shelter of the shack, locked and bolted the door, barricaded it as well as the narrow window, and lay shivering on the bed which still showed the impress of Molly's little form.

He fell asleep towards dawn, and was awakened by shouts and bangings upon the barricaded door by Joe Brownlow, who, in the early morning, had found Molly's clothes, with the note pinned to them, upon the river-bank.

" Possibly she has chosen the better part," observed the remittance man, drily, when he heard the humiliating confession that Dick Earle was obliged to make.

The money that he had taken for his share in the driving of a beautiful young girl to a suicide's grave scorched and seared even his sin-stained soul.

"Take it back, and if I hadn't put myself in your clutches I'd give you the finest hiding a man ever had," said Joe Brownlow, as he disgustedly flung the wad of notes on the table.

The local authorities were kept busy that week-end, investigating first of all a sudden death and then what seemed to be a suicide with all the elements of a romance surrounding it.

Owing to the swift current of the river, the body would certainly have been carried out to sea, and there was no suspicion of foul play, for Dick Earle had been in Joe Brownlow's company all the time since his marriage, and the latter was prepared to swear that Molly was lying asleep on his bed when he and her husband left to attend to the matter of the Registrar's sudden death.

Dick Earle acted the part of the distracted husband to perfection, although, deep down, he was not nearly so prostrate with grief as he pretended to be. In the midst of it all he was able to congratulate himself on his foresight in securing the papers which would mean so much when he got to England—the marriage certificate of Molly's mother, the letters that her brother had written to her, the faded photograph of herself, and Molly's own birth certificate. These proofs, together with the evidence of his own marriage, would prove his claim to be Molly's next-of-kin beyond the faintest shadow of doubt.

A hundred thousand pounds! The pleasing prospect was ever with him, and not the least

pleasurable thought was that, into the bargain, he would be free, for he fully believed that Molly had committed the act of criminal folly that she had announced in her last pitiful little note.

That note was in the possession of the police, and, pending the finish of the enquiries that they were making, he would have to stay in Oakham.

Probably the Mintons would be brought into it, but he had nothing to fear.

Molly's description would be circulated throughout the whole of the North-West Frontier, and all parts and railway stations would be watched.

After a time, if she did not turn up, she would be legally considered dead. Deep down in his heart, although he did not acknowledge it, even to himself, this was what Dick Earle hoped for.

CHAPTER XIX

THAT terrible night journey through the forest, always accompanied by the fear that a hand would descend upon her shoulder and drag her back, took years of basking in the sunlight of happiness and love to eliminate from Molly's mind.

After three hours of wandering which seemed like a dozen years, the young girl came to a small clearing, which a party of lumbermen had evidently denuded of the redwoods and maples that grew so thickly all around.

But the fact of being out under the open sky, with no lacework of trees above her head, to be able to see the stars and the moon, brought a great rush of joy to Molly's sick heart.

"If only I could lie down and rest awhile—oh, I am so tired, so very tired!"

Every aching nerve and sinew was crying out for rest; every fibre of Molly's being craved for a surcease of the terrors which crowded so thickly upon her and threatened to engulf her.

She raised her white, piteous little face, with the great grey eyes swimming in tears, to the silent heavens; and then, as if in pity for her sorrow, the moon shone out brave and white from behind a bank of clouds, and revealed a

shack placed a little way further up on a gentle slope in the ground.

"Oh, supposing that somebody lives there!" Molly gasped, in sheer, undiluted delight.

The prospect of human companionship caused her to run instead of walk up the bank; but it turned out that the weather-beaten, tumble-down dwelling was a disused shack, and so part of Molly's expectations were disappointed. But even though the roof in wet weather must have let in the rain as it now let in the wind, and there was no place but the floor for her to lie upon, Molly was thankful even for such poor shelter as it afforded, and, utterly exhausted, she curled herself up and went to sleep, one hand beneath the tear-stained face that possessed beauty which would have set an artist's soul aflame.

The dawn was breaking when Molly awoke, stiff and cold, still tired and, above all, hungry.

Oh, how hungry she was! Though she was weary and aching in every limb from contact with the damp, rotting boards, she got up and made her way outside to see if by any chance she could find out where she was.

From the slight eminence in the forest on which the deserted shack was built, Molly could see, a little way beyond, the vast open prairie. She must have walked almost dead straight through the belt of forest land that skirted the township.

There was nothing for her to eat, for only in the late spring and early summer was it possible to eat a few of the green tender plants, and so,

hungry, tired, and despondent, Molly made for the open.

The trail lay like a wavering dark ribbon over the billows of prairie that reached right to the foot of the giant, snow-capped mountains that stood carved out in sharp relief against the horizon.

Hardly knowing what she was doing, for all movement had become mechanical, Molly kept straight on, in the grey light of the dawn, with no definite plan of action in her mind; her only idea was to get as far away from Dick Earle as possible.

In the urgency of her own plight she had for the time being almost forgotten Jack Lorimer; but suddenly, with a sickening rush, memory returned, and in her ears rang the cold but angry tones of Mrs. Minton's voice, telling her that Jack Lorimer—kindly, open-hearted Jack, who was her only friend, with the exception of Jimmy Minton, his employer—was dead, killed without a moment's warning in the copper mine along with many of his poor, luckless comrades.

There was not a soul to whom she could turn; to go back again to life with her stepfather at Lone Pine Station was out of the question; starvation and ultimate death out there on the wild prairie would be infinitely preferable. It was impossible to go back to Log House, since Mrs. Minton and her daughter Grace had so clearly shown their dislike of her. Life seemed a hopeless, monstrous futility, a hideous mockery at all attempts to live it with even a crumb of consolation for all that she had to endure.

Molly had walked three or perhaps four miles across the unbroken prairie land, when suddenly the landscape changed.

Huge, jagged masses of bare grey rock stretched, apparently to infinitude, before Molly's despairing eyes; up the grey sides, like attacking columns, the dark, daring pines swarmed in massed battalions; but one, a mighty giant that towered even above the tallest rock, stood lonely and rigid, like a silent sentinel, seeming to point upwards to the dawn-flushed sky.

Molly sank down by a rock that was shaped curiously like a cross. She felt so puny, so lost and insignificant in the presence of the mighty, ageless mountains; but as her mournful eyes gazed upon the silent pine sentinel, the recollection of her mother came to her, and the half-delirious girl seemed to hear her voice reading from her Bible, as she had so often done when she was a little child.

"Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee."

The words which have sung their comforting way into the souls of men right down the ages repeated themselves over and over again in Molly's brain until they once more performed their divine mission.

Molly raised herself to her knees and clasped her hands, cut and bruised from her flight through the forest, in an attitude of supplication.

Lifting her face to the dawn-flushed sky, she prayed, with a sob of earnestness in her voice, "Oh, God, show me what to do! I am all alone, without any friend to help. Show me the way."

Then, because it had left her lips every night of her life since her mother had taught it to her at the age of two, Molly recited the greatest prayer that the world has known since Christianity's dawn.

She lay at the foot of the cross-shaped rock for a little longer, and then, as if in answer to her petition, the remembrance of Jasper Ling, the dear old musician who had said that no person could become a great artist unless they had sorrowed and suffered and wept. "Surely, I have done all three," thought the friendless girl as she got to her feet.

Fortunately, by cutting across the forest as she had done, Molly had curtailed a good deal of her journey to Misty Valley, which lay about five miles further to the north.

Molly reached it by accident. She wandered on meaning to ask directions from the first person she met. But it was only seven o'clock in the morning when, with a gasp of joy, she saw in the distance the little red-roofed dwelling set like a jewel in the blue mists that gave the valley its name.

"I didn't know that I was so near. Thank God!" cried Molly as, endowed with new life, she stumbled, half running, half walking towards the house.

But her strength gave out just as she reached the door, and Leo, the old negro, who was performing some duties in the hall, gave a cry of mingled horror and pity when, hearing a thud against the door, he opened it to find Molly, unconscious, lying at his feet.

CHAPTER XX

"A LITTLE longer, mates, just a little longer. Here, I'm sick of swilling water. Have a pull you, Jim."

The words came faintly from lips that were pale pink instead of full and red, as they should have been; the blue eyes which were opened widely were vacant as those of a newborn baby.

There was a big cage-like construction on one leg, and the lower part of the strong, virile young face was swathed in bandages.

A young girl sat by the side of the sick man, her face pale and anxious, and her eyes wistful as she bent over the restless figure, smoothing the sheets and pillows, and searching in vain for any sign of intelligence in the eyes that were dearest to her on earth.

The room was a pleasant, airy apartment, hung with cheerful pictures and gay with flowers of early spring.

"If only this delirium would cease! If only your poor, tired brain would let you rest! Jack, darling, beloved of all men, you are not in that horrible mine now. You are with me, and I love you—love you—love you!"

What is it that love does to a woman?

Without it, she only sleeps; with it, alone, she lives.

The young girl, with passion flaming in her flushed cheeks and shining eyes, bent over and punctuated her avowals of love with warm kisses on the white, smooth forehead.

Grace Minton looked positively lovely at the moment when she faced her cousin, who had knocked, and then, receiving no answer, entered the room.

Jimmy Minton looked awkward, as if he had unintentionally played the part of an eavesdropper.

As a matter of fact, his cousin's declaration of love for the sick man had been made in a voice quite clear enough to reach his ears, and as he had never suspected her secret he was, to say the very least, startled.

But Grace's revealing of her heart had set a whole gamut of emotion rioting madly in his own. However, for the present he must stifle his feelings, for Grace was speaking to him.

"Did you want me, Jimmy?" she asked, in the carefully lowered voice that she always used in the sick-room.

"No, old girl. I just looked in to see how our friend Lorimer is this morning," was her cousin's reply.

Grace threw a miserable but passionately loving glance towards the restless, raving figure upon the bed.

"I don't think there's any change, Jimmy. If he doesn't come to himself soon, the fever will wear him out. He's always imagining that he's still down in the mine, and—it's characteristic of him, of course, he always giving his own water

to somebody else, saying that he has got more than he needs."

There was a sound very like a sob in the young girl's voice as she finished.

Grace had nearly fainted with joy when Jack Lorimer, badly hurt, it was true, but still alive, was brought up, the last but one, from the ill-fated mine.

The little hospital, which had been equipped and presented to the inhabitants of Mintonville by Jimmy Minton's father, was crowded out, and considering that she had known him in London, it was not thought strange when Grace begged that the young miner should be taken to the Log House, where there was room and to spare.

There is seldom a sufficiency, much less a surplus, of female help in Canada, and Mrs. Minton readily agreed to let Grace nurse the patient, who, if the truth were told, was anything but welcome at Log House, so far as she was concerned.

She had not yet forgiven the young lover for the throwing of her gift back in her face, and she thought that her nephew's anger when he learned that she had allowed Molly to depart with the man to whom she was engaged was most unjustifiable.

However, since she had safely got Molly out of the way, she could afford to relent a little.

Jack Lorimer had sustained severe wounds in the head, while his right leg was so badly crushed that even now the doctors were not sure that amputation was not the only possible thing.

Jimmy Minton, after another searching glance

at the unconscious figure on the bed, cleared his throat as if he were about to say something difficult but imperative.

His cousin looked up, her eyebrows raised a little in surprise.

It was unusual for Jimmy to feel awkward with her—they had always been such splendid chums—but he *was* awkward, for his whole bearing betrayed the fact.

After a further second's hesitation, the young mineowner spoke.

"I say, don't think me an interfering ass, Grace, but—er—oh, hang it all, I may as well out with it!—I overheard what you said just now."

The words came out in painful, abrupt little jerks. Jimmy Minton was ever chivalrous where women were concerned, and the accidental glimpse into his cousin's heart would have been kept by him for ever as a sacred secret, if only he had not his own love and happiness also at stake.

From his childhood upwards, the young mineowner had been a sigher for the unattainable, and the harder it was for him to climb the mountain of his desire, the better he liked it.

Molly at present represented the mountain, and the difficulties that beset his path in his endeavour to reach her only set his soul still more madly afire with longing.

The girl with the wistful face and dark grey eyes was never out of his mind for a single moment. Molly's image was with him by day, and it haunted his dreams at night.

He had been furiously angry with his aunt for

allowing Dick Earle to take her away, even though he represented himself as her future husband.

"Of course, the fellow was perfectly right in thinking of himself in that way, since the poor little girl ran away without telling him that she had exercised the feminine right to 'change her mind.'"

He remembered every detail of the pathetic story that Molly had told him.

"Naturally, if Aunt Audrey showed her the door, and she hadn't Lorimer to fall back upon, she had to go somewhere, and doubtless this fellow Earle was the only one to whom she could turn in a difficult situation."

He reasoned the matter of Molly's departure out on these lines, and comforted himself with the reflection that, since Molly had quite a fair sum of money in her possession, she was financially secure, and anyway, no man could force a girl into marriage if she did not desire it, in these days.

His bad ankle kept him confined to the house, but he was able to get about with the aid of a stick, and in the meantime he had entrusted a friend—a very clever amateur detective—with the task of tracing Molly Osborne.

The friend was even then motoring back from Oakham at breakneck speed to bring the news of Molly's marriage and subsequent supposed suicide.

But as yet the young mineowner was unaware of the tragedy that had befallen the girl whom he loved so passionately, and Grace's avowal of love

for Jack Lorimer had suggested a plan whereby he might get rid of him as a rival for Molly's love.

"I—er—overheard what you said just now."

He repeated the sentence awkwardly, and Grace turned her eyes away from the white, bandaged figure on the bed which was between them, and Jimmy Minton saw a fierce, defiant light leap into his cousin's clear blue eyes.

"Well, and supposing that you did hear me? What then? I suppose you'll go straight and tell mother, so that she'll send me away from home on some tomfool visit, or, if I refuse to go, she'll not allow me near Jack at all!"

The hard young voice softened for a moment as it pronounced Jack's name.

With her eyes alight with eager love and longing, her cheeks flaming scarlet and the morning sunshine lighting up her proud, defiant head, Grace Minton looked magnificent—like some of the great women in history whose love stories, told to a cynical, tired world, endow it for a time with fresh and glorious vision.

There was more than admiration in Jimmy Minton's face as he gazed at his cousin with newly opened eyes.

"Heavens! How she must love to look like that!" he thought.

He slipped round to the other side of the bed and laid a kindly, sympathetic hand on the young girl's shoulder. His voice thrilled with a subtle, soothing note which implied understanding of the difficult heart problem which beset her.

"Of course, I won't tell your mother, kiddie.

I don't wonder at any girl falling in love with such a splendid chap as Jack Lorimer."

He looked carefully at the white face on the pillows, just now very still, to see if there was any glimmering of consciousness. But there was none.

"Good luck to you, kiddie. I hope he returns the love that he has won from you," Jimmy Minton continued, slowly, knowing well what the reply would be.

But, nevertheless, he felt brutal when he saw his cousin's eyes fill with tears.

"He'll never return it—never. He loves Molly Osborne, that worthless little creature who has quite evidently been flirting with him, for she went away yesterday to be married to a Mr. Earle, who called on mother," said the young girl, with a bitter inflection in her voice.

To do her justice, Grace Minton was unaware of Molly's story, and she had not been present when, between Dick Earle and her mother, Molly had been practically forced to leave Log House. She honestly thought that Molly's visit to Jack Lorimer was a mad escapade, the last kick, as it were, of a flirt before she bound herself for life.

But love gives an uncannily clear, and often cruel, insight to those who are its helpless victims.

However lightly Molly chose to treat it, Jack Lorimer was prepared to lay all the wealth of his great heart at her feet, and Grace knew this as surely as she knew the depth of her own love for him.

Her cousin's next words startled her.

"He is not the only one who loves Molly

Osborne, for I love her myself, but there is this difference between my love and his—I will marry her, while he—well, he will be forced to forget her."

Jimmy Minton's confidence in himself sometimes amounted to arrogance. It would have carried him far if he had not been so very rich.

Grace stared, her red lips falling a little apart in her astonishment.

"But—you can't—how can you marry the girl when she has already gone away to be married to another man?" she asked, incredulity in every tone of her voice.

Her cousin's lips closed with a snap.

"She hasn't. Molly Osborne may have gone away, but she hasn't gone away to be married—hasn't the least intention of being married, in fact. Don't ask me how I know. I do know, that's all. But," he continued, drawing his cousin into the sun-gilded window recess and lowering his voice, "I believe that she has a leaning towards Jack Lorimer, so, if you are wise, you'll play your cards well and get engaged to him before she appears on the scene again."

The young girl gave a slight shrug.

"It's all very well to talk like that, Jimmy, but so long as Molly Osborne is unmarried, and Jack Lorimer knows it, he'll not give up hopes of winning her. It is impossible to apply ordinary standards to him. He would be absolutely unmoved by a girl's money or position, or any thing of that sort," she said, hopelessly, but with loving admiration in her voice.

"But what money and position fail to accom-

plish, sweetness, kindness, and softness will possibly achieve. And why need he know that Molly is not married? Only I know that she is not—your mother and you can both stick to your original story with perfect truth. Molly went away to be married, and for her part, she believes the first report that came from the mines saying that Jack Lorimer had perished."

A radiant new light—the light of hope renewed—shone in Grace Minton's face as she took in the meaning of her cousin's words.

Both of them comforted themselves with the ancient adage that in the game of love, as in war, ordinary standards of truth and honour did not apply, and that the sweet, glorious end justified the means, so long as they did not include crimes which were punishable by law.

And, after all, what she would tell Jack would be perfectly true, so far as she herself was aware. Although Jimmy appeared quite confident of the fact that Molly was not married, yet he had no positive proof to the contrary.

As for Molly's belief that Jack Lorimer had perished in the mine, that was her cousin's affair, and not hers. Besides, if she did not know where Molly was to be found, how could she possibly undeceive her?

With such balm as these reflections, Grace Minton drugged her conscience, and her cousin easily satisfied his by the enumeration in his mind of the many material advantages with which he could endow Molly once he had captured her heart.

CHAPTER XXI

THE afternoon, with its softness and blueness, and hint of spring and fresh growing things, was well on the way towards early evening when Jack Lorimer opened his eyes for the first time with any intelligence in their depths.

Grace was sitting beside him, faithful as usual, and her eyes were filled with all the glory of love that now seemed possible of fulfilment.

Because of the joy in her heart she had changed her somewhat careless morning attire for a soft blue dress that she had brought over from England.

A blue fillet was threaded through her hair, and her cheeks bloomed softly pink.

She was altogether a charming picture of a girl just blossoming into womanhood, and Jack looked at her for a moment with quiet eyes in which, just at first, there was no hint of recognition.

Up till a few seconds ago, he had fancied himself still in the pitch-black, airless mine, fighting for dear life, along with his mates.

These thoughts persisted for a little while, but suddenly, with a clearness that sent an acute pain through his temples, the image of a fair face,

with large grey eyes and long black curls, passed, sharply defined, across his mental vision.

His pale lips framed the word "Molly!"

It was little more than a whisper, but it carried to the love-sharpened ears of the girl at his side, and robbed of its joy much of Grace Minton's anticipations of the moment when the delirium should cease.

She rose quickly and reached a medicine bottle from a shelf. She poured the correct dose into a wineglass, and, with her arm supporting the weak shoulders, held it to the pale, bloodless lips.

The effort to drink exhausted the young miner, and he closed his eyes as if wishful of going to sleep again.

Grace smoothed the sheets and pillows and brought a vase containing some beautiful lilies, which she placed on a small table at the foot of the bed, so that his eyes should have something beautiful to gaze upon when next they opened.

But Jack Lorimer was not sleeping. Behind the closed lids, his brain was working, and all his thoughts were of Molly.

Where was she? Would Miss Minton—he had recognised his nurse by this time—fetch her to him if he begged her to do so?

The thought of and longing for Molly at length became an obsession.

The young man felt that he could not support another moment of life unless he knew that Molly was safe and well.

To Grace Minton's infinite joy, he opened

his eyes. She bent over him and passed her soft hand gently over his forehead.

"Do you know me, Jack—Mr. Lorimer?" she hastily corrected herself.

A pale wraith of a smile passed over the worn young face.

"Yes, Miss Minton; of course I know you, and you are so kind, but would you—would you," the faint pitiful voice sounded so infinitely appealing—"Could you tell me if Miss Osborne is safe and well? Could I see her?"

Some of the softness passed out of the girlish face, and Grace's lips contracted into a thin, hard line.

It was a critical moment. Possibly any bad news might throw him back—retard his recovery, even kill him. She decided to temporise with the truth which she was longing to impart.

"She—Miss Osborne is quite well, Mr. Lorimer," Grace Minton replied, with a little quiver in her voice.

But that did not satisfy the insistent invalid.

"Where is she? Fetch her to me. I want her. I want my beautiful little Molly," Jack moaned.

Grace evaded the truth as well as she could, but Jack clung to his point with all the tenacity of an invalid.

When the doctor came in to see him he frowned heavily as he took his patient's pulse and temperature.

"What is he worrying about, Miss Minton?" he asked, calling Grace outside the sick-room.

Mrs. Minton, who was present, took it upon herself to reply, with an acid note in her voice

as she spoke Molly's name. "The young girl who had became acquainted with my nephew under such curious circumstances is, it seems, a great friend of his—in fact, he is in love with her."

The elder woman did not see the young girl wince at her words.

"She went away from us on the day of the accident to be married," she finished.

The doctor considered for a moment.

"H'm! that's very unfortunate. The news will be a bad shock to him, I am afraid, but, on the other hand, he'll be dead before morning if he goes on using up his strength in fretting like this. I think that Miss Grace had better tell him—he may take it better from somebody young, like himself."

Grace Minton's feelings were very mixed indeed as she bent over the sick man, who was still demanding to know why Molly could not be brought to him.

"She will, perhaps, come in a few days. She went away on the day that the shaft fell in at the mine," she explained gently, still unwilling to wound the man she loved until he should be better able to bear the blow.

But at last she was obliged to tell the truth, as she conceived it, about her rival, and with quickened heart-beats and averted face she said, in a low voice, "Molly Osborne has gone away to be married."

The young girl waited breathlessly, but with a certain eager impatience to see how Jack Lorimer would take the news. At first the mean-

ing of the words did not penetrate the consciousness of the man who had been so near to death.

Grace Minton pretended to rearrange the lilies at the side of the bed, but out of the corner of her eye she watched the white young face closely.

It was quite impassive for a long time—for so long, indeed, that Grace began to wonder if he had heard her at all.

But Jack Lorimer had heard, and it seemed to him as if all the world were slipping away, leaving him alone in a measureless universe. For so many months, love had been the only reason for its existence, the mainspring of his best endeavour, and the supreme height of his ultimate reward; for he had never doubted that his own mighty love would awaken some response in the heart of the girl he wanted so badly for his own.

Jack Lorimer was a true son of the North, and besides the splendid fact of his youth, he had an almost inexhaustible stock of vitality to draw upon; the constitution that had never been undermined by a single illness had stood him in good stead, and he had awakened to consciousness with far more strength than either Grace or the doctor would have dreamed possible.

It took some little time for the news about Molly to sink into his brain, but the effort to grasp it cleared away the fog that seemed to paralyse effort, and when Grace, having no further excuse, once turned her eyes full upon the bed, she saw something that made her catch her breath with a little gasp, for she knew that he had understood.

There was such a look of hopeless love and longing on his face—a face that, in expression, was as frank and open as a child's. Here was a man who had no need for the fox-like cunning of lesser men. He would go forth boldly into the open, and that which he could not take by his strength he would not have. Had she not seen his eyes like polished steel points? Grace's whole being surged out towards the man who had so completely won her heart.

Love made her touch light as thistledown, and her voice was just a tender crooning as, venturing to brush back the wavy hair from the broad forehead, she said softly, "I am sorry, Mr. Lorimer, if what I have told you comes as a shock to you."

There was no reply from the man who looked so very white and still—such a pitiful shadow of his former handsome, virile self.

Jack Lorimer was fully conscious of the fact that he was drawing upon a reserve stock of strength, and he was concentrating his whole mind on the news that Grace Minton had imparted to him; he felt disinclined to be drawn into a conversation just then.

But Grace Minton's next words brought his endeavour to piece things together to a sudden and abrupt end. For, obeying a certain feline impulse, Grace Minton permitted herself to speak words which, if they did not exactly disparage her rival, implied that Jack needed pity on her account.

"Poor Mr. Lorimer, it was a wicked thing to do, because mother tells me that you loved Miss

Osborne dearly. But she was quite evidently flirting with you, and," the soft voice became honey-like in its sweetness, "You are too splendid a man to be played with by any girl."

Grace Minton was startled at the effect which her words produced. Forgetting his weakness, and the agony which his shattered leg was causing him, Jack Lorimer raised himself on one elbow, and the blood rushed in hot, fierce waves to his face; the steel-blue eyes glinted, and the wasted hands involuntarily formed themselves into fists, just as if it had been a man who had called Molly—his Molly, who probably had never even heard the word—a heartless flirt!

"You mustn't say things like that, indeed, you must not, Miss Minton. Molly Osborne is as pure as——" his bright eyes sought the distant mountains with their white caps which could be seen in the distance through the open window—"as the untrodden snow upon the mountain tops," he concluded, making a poetic simile for probably the first time in his whole hard-working life.

For a second he remained staring fixedly out of the window, his mind having already reverted to the problem of Molly's disappearance, while Grace, sick at heart with shame and hopelessness—for, through the very force of her own love, she was enabled dimly to fathom Jack Lorimer's passionate love for Molly—crept out of the room to hide her flushed, humiliated face.

Exhausted by the effort that he had made, and feeling unable to fight the drowsiness that was creeping over him—Nature's effort to assist his

recovery—Jack Lorimer was sinking into the first perfectly normal sleep that he had known since the accident.

The doctor would have been delighted, and his delight might have justified itself if only Jimmy Minton had remained with his friend a moment longer, or if only Grace had stayed in the sick room.

But, in her agitation, the young girl had forgotten to close the door behind her, with the result that a light wind, blowing from an open window in the corridor, sent it back as far as it would go, and Molly's name, spoken in anguished, unlowered tones, floated in quite clearly to the sick-room, and brought Jack Lorimer back with a jerk from the oblivion towards which he had been drifting.

Jimmy Minton, his features white as marble, and working as if they were controlled by invisible wires, had rushed from the presence of the man who had brought him the news of Molly's death—rushed as if he had suddenly been bereft of his reason—and had made blindly for his own room, which was almost opposite the one in which Jack Lorimer was lying.

Grace forgot her own sense of shame and hopelessness when she saw her cousin, for the first time in all her life, in such a state.

"Jimmy, what has happened—what is the matter? There isn't another accident, is there?" cried the girl, sharply, catching the man by the arm and unconsciously shaking him.

Jimmy Minton's tragic eyes looked into those of his cousin, and the expression of them made

her shudder at the time, and took years to eradicate from her memory.

"It's Molly—my poor little beautiful Molly! She's committed suicide in Big Oak River, and they are holding an enquiry into it this afternoon!"

The whole universe held but one fact for Jimmy Minton at that moment, and though his eyes were fixed upon the open door of the sick-room he did not see it, and every word carried to Jack Lorimer's ears as he lay, prone and helpless as an infant, in bed.

But the effort that he made to rise, the consequent bellow of sheer agony that gripped the hearts even of the couple in the corridor who had been responsible for it, rang through every room in Log House like the dying roar of a hopeless victim at a Spanish bull-fight.

"He'll not pull through now, I'm afraid; at least, it'll be a miracle if he does. It's a pity that the final news about that girl couldn't have been kept from him," said the doctor, sadly, as he looked helplessly down at the tossing, raving figure on the bed.

CHAPTER XXII

LITTLE furred or feathered creatures from the forest were often brought in to old Jasper Ling by his tender-hearted negro servant, who never seemed to have possessed any name other than Leo. "Slave" would perhaps have been a better term to apply to the woolly-haired servitor, who would have cheerfully sacrificed a dozen lives, had he possessed them, to save his adored master an hour's discomfort.

With the tenderness that characterised all his doings, and made him the idol of New York when, for a brief three months during the year he consented to take singing engagements, the grand old fellow cared for the least of these little creatures, and when they were well set them free again.

But Leo's arms had never borne so strange a burden as they did in the early morning when Molly, more dead than alive, fell against the doorway of the little cottage, unconscious.

"Why, it's the child who came with Mr. Minton a few days ago—the little singing bird with the golden voice! But her hands and feet are lacerated, and her face is the face of one who has been through the tortures of hell!" cried the old man as, with the aid of the woman who had come to him as temporary cook four years ago, and who had steadily refused, ever since, to leave him,

Jasper Ling stripped the broken shoes and tattered stockings from Molly's feet and bound them up with soft rags steeped in healing oil.

Mrs. Clark, an old widow who had lost her only child—a girl—when she was fourteen years old, promply lavished all the wealth of her starved mother-heart upon the little waif, who had, as yet, given no account of herself, for the reason that, for over a week, she, like the man she loved, was dead to the things of the outside world, and lived constantly in the scenes that had given rise to her condition.

Night after night Jasper Ling sat with the fever-racked girl, and not once, but a hundred times during the course of that perilous week, did Molly pour the whole of her pitiful little story into the old man's sympathetic ears.

If his unworldly old heart had not fallen so completely under Molly's spell, he would certainly have sent word to Jimmy Minton that she was safe with him.

But the whole of Molly's treatment at Log House—the open hostility of its mistress, and the scarcely less bitter enmity of her daughter—came out in these delirious spells, and the old fellow, burning with indignation, decided that he would let Molly choose for herself in the matter of letting them know her whereabouts when she recovered.

Jasper Ling lived in complete isolation in his mystical blue mountain valley, and no whisper of the doings even of the nearest township reached him in his beautiful retreat.

Certainly, if he had known Jimmy Minton's

anxiety, he would have sent word by Leo at once to the young mineowner, but though his mother and cousin were spoken of, his name scarcely entered Molly's ravings—they were chiefly about her marriage with Dick Earle, her terror of him, and the means of escape that she had taken.

"Poor little one, to be married almost before she has realised the fact that she is alive," murmured Jasper, pityingly, smoothing the long dark curls and holding the small hot hand in his as if he hoped, by some miraculous means, to pour some of his own rugged strength into the little body that needed it so sorely.

In his young days he had studied medicine, and he knew exactly what to do to aid Molly's recovery.

He had his own ideas, and very pronounced they were too, of the immeasurable value of the sights and sounds of Nature to those whose hearts were in tune with the greatest of all mothers.

Spring—warm, sweet, and scented—had come to the valley. In this little sheltered nook it was almost as warm as summer would be, some weeks hence, in the towns and cities. The old singer, with the sure sympathy and insight of the true artist, had placed Molly's bed in a little rustic arbour out in the midst of the garden which he tended with his own hands and which no outsider had ever yet entered.

It was a garden of almost incredible beauty, a paradisical vision.

Scarlet and blue, purple and pearl and opal, rose-pink and lavender-grey—the glorious spring flowers were massed about Molly's bed in white

marble vases and they floated in large open bowls of blackest ebony; and at her feet, like a carpet of rich living colours, the flowers spread in glorious waves right to the edge of the forest slope on which the cottage was built.

A little stream, tumbling over the rocks in the valley, made a faint tinkling music which blended with the song of the forest birds and broke what might otherwise have been too profound a stillness.

It was in these surroundings that Molly first came to herself, and it chanced that, for the moment, she was alone, Jasper Ling having gone into the house for something that he wanted.

The flowers held the young girl mute. She sat up in the soft bed, her curls tumbling around her in a rich dark shower, her eyes wide with ecstatic delight; she clasped her hands around her knees, and for a moment remained motionless.

She drank in the fragrance, colour, and peace of it all with the avidity of a soul that longs for, but has always been starved of, beauty. Every little rushing breeze, every faint forest call, was to her an invitation and a caress.

Molly was so intoxicated with the loveliness of her surroundings that she gave no thought to the wonder of her being there. But when she saw Jasper Ling, his kindly rugged face all smiles, coming towards her down the path that led through the midst of the gorgeous carpet of flowers, recollection came back with a rush, and in a second the glory of the garden was gone; in its place was the horrible scene that had occurred in the Oakham Registrar's office, and

the subsequent hour spent in Joe Brownlow's shack. Then the escape, the terror lest her husband should find her, and finally the awful journey through the forest at dead of night, resulting in the blessed finding of the little house in Misty Valley.

"Don't grieve, little lass, but only have patience, for thus the worst tangle that has ever tied itself into a life will be smoothed out," said the soothing voice which, when it was raised in song, held millions in its thrall.

But the whole black weight of Molly's burden was pressing too heavily upon her little shoulders for any advice, however good, to be heeded.

It reflected itself in the tragic glance of the great grey eyes as Molly looked up and asked, with a bitterness far beyond her years, "Can patience undo marriage, Mr. Ling? Can it make me free? I—the room was swimming round, and I tried to say 'No' when I was asked to promise all kinds of things, but—but my throat hurt, and the words wouldn't come."

Jasper Ling, at the other end of the long road that Molly's young feet had not started upon, looked at the glory of his garden, and then, instead of answering the girl's pitiful questions, he slowly rose and gathered an armful of blossoms, which he threw on to the counterpane with a boyish laugh, saying, "Look at those and be unhappy if you dare! Just think! They've lain all the winter in the earth, longing for the time when they would be let out of their prison, and now you are going to let them die without so much as a single glance at their beauty," and the kindly eyes

held reproach in their glance as the old man spoke.

Molly stretched out her little thin white arms and gathered the glowing flowers to her breast.

"I love them, and I do appreciate their beauty!" she exclaimed, passionately, as she examined the flowers one by one, her face growing more peaceful and her eyes calmer every moment.

The old singer watched her narrowly. His object had been to divert her mind into another channel, and he knew that the mere physical effort of stretching out her hand to examine the blossoms one by one would tire her, weak as she was, after such a bout as she had had.

When he saw the dark lashes fall on the young cheek, and the flowers fall from the little hand, he was satisfied.

It was four hours later when Molly next awoke, and the afternoon sun was throwing long shadows over the arbour floor.

Jasper Ling was by her side, reading.

"No talking—not a word—until every drop of this is gone," he said, gently but firmly, holding a cup of hot, strong soup to the pale lips.

Molly obeyed with the sweet grace of a charming child, and when she had finished lay back in obedience to further orders and refrained from expending her little store of strength in the asking of questions.

But, though Molly's lips were silent, her brain was working, and it was only natural that her thoughts should fly to Jack, who was, she believed, dead and, by this time, buried. Two tears fell

from her brimming eyes and lay, unheeded, upon her cheeks.

Jasper Ling, who had only been making a pretence at reading, quietly and tenderly dried them with his own handkerchief and, feeling that it would do Molly less harm to talk than to remain silent, took one of the wasted little hands in his own, and holding it fast in his fatherly, comforting grip, said, "Tell me what causes you such pain, little one."

Sobs choked the poor, weak little voice and forbade speech for a few moments; but the old man waited patiently, only he drew the other hand into his grasp, and over Molly there rushed such a surging tide of gratitude amd love that she raised the big brown hand to her soft lips and kissed it.

"You are so good, and kind, and strong—oh, very strong! You won't send me away from you, will you? Will you?" she pleaded, her voice, by reason of her fear, growing more insistent every moment.

The old man, who looked with moist eyes across his glowing carpet of flowers, replied: "You can stay as long as you like, my child; but you are young and the world will call, and when you are better you will want to seek your friends."

"I—I haven't any friends, I tell you. I had only one friend in all the world, and he has been killed." Molly's shoulders heaved beneath the pretty frilled nightdress that Mrs. Clark's little daughter had worn long ago, and her eyes grew starry bright.

"It was Jack Lorimer, and you loved him,

child. Don't be afraid to open your heart to an old man, for it will do you good," said the gentle, tactful old voice, which was already beginning to cast its soothing spell over Molly's troubled heart.

Her glance sought the waving line of distant tree-tops that looked so black and feathery against the sapphire bowl of the sky, and a flush slowly crept into the white cheeks, making the sick girl look more than ever like an adorable child as she replied, with a look of naïve wonder in her eyes, "What a wizard you are, Mr. Ling! You seem to know everything. Yes, I loved Jack Lorimer. I shall always love him—always, until I die, although he will never know. He—he did not love me," she finished, in an odd, choked little whisper, as if she had said something to be ashamed of.

The big brown hand which held hers tightened its grip. Looking at Molly, Jasper Ling wondered how any normal, healthy young man could resist her.

"But he knows now, and if he did not love you when he inhabited this shortsighted world of many mistakes, he now does so with a love a million times intensified. Some day you'll understand and know, but not now—not now." The eyes of the old dreamer, who was sometimes regarded as a harmless but delightful crank by those who were incapable of thoughts which had not gold for their base and summit, looked sorrowfully down at the young face which was showing signs of suffering that was far too keen for its years.

There was silence in the little rustic arbour, and it was Molly who broke it, once again with her beseeching little plea not to be sent away.

"I'll work so hard for you, Mr. Ling. I can cook and sew and clean and darn, and do heaps of useful things," she said, earnestly, in case her benefactor should dream that she wanted the shelter of his home for no return whatsoever.

"I will teach you to do other things well also, though such accomplishments as you have are worthy of all honour. I will train you to sing so that your voice will bring peace and happiness to weary hearts. But you must be willing to remain here, in isolation, with none but me and my servants for company, to eat and drink and practise and to study as I dictate, for at least three years. Tell me, child, can you endure isolation for so long with the world-voice calling to your youth?"

Jasper Ling's voice boomed through the quiet garden, and the intensity of it almost frightened the young girl who listened.

But it set every fibre of Molly's being, weak and ill as she still was, athrill with ambition.

Such a golden opportunity as this must surely have dropped from Heaven! Always from her earliest childhood, when she had sung and danced to the trees and flowers in the forest, she had imagined them to be people who were all listening and applauding her.

The singing and dancing in the whisky saloon had given her no pleasure, because she felt that there were none amongst her listeners who remembered her singing once it was over.

But trained by the greatest singer in the country to make the very most of her gift, what might she not achieve?

Molly's passion was for social service—she longed to make people happy; and through her eager, excited mind there ran wild schemes for the spending of the fortune that had yet to be made!

"Love is over for me, but work remains," thought the girl, with all the earnest finality of extreme youth.

Somehow, Molly felt that when she was a great singer her husband, if ever he found her, would have no power over her—no right to the obedience which she would have to yield to him if he discovered her now.

"I will do all that you wish so willingly, Mr. Ling. I don't want my husband to find me—I dread that more than anything in the world. You won't tell anybody, not a soul, that I am here, will you—will you?" pleaded Molly, turning her dark grey eyes supplicatingly upon the old man.

"Mrs. Clark and Leo never mention their master's business—they would both defend me with their lives, I believe. Nobody shall dream that you are living, until you wish to lift the veil yourself."

Then, with a sharp look at Molly's bright eyes and flushed cheeks, the old fellow prescribed a soothing draught made by himself from fresh forest herbs, after which, with a little contented sigh, Molly turned over on her side and slept.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE weeks became months in the quiet house in the lovely valley which Molly now regarded as her home.

Every day had seen her growing stronger and better under the adoring and skilful care of Mrs. Clark, the homage of the old negro and the tender friendship of the old musician, who was able so easily to bridge the years which lay between his little pupil and himself.

Molly's cheeks had blossomed into pink roundness, her black curls were glossier than ever, while laughter bubbled often from her crimson lips and spilled over into her beautiful eyes.

She was growing, too, and her slender, childish figure, which had previously been half-starved during her life at Lone Pine Station, began to fill out and the soft curves gave promise of fuller, richer beauty which was to come.

Molly was allowed ample leisure in which to rest; but old Jasper Ling, who saw the woeful meagreness of the girl's education and realised the value of every moment, gave her no time in which to mope and brood over the sorrows that she had known.

Every hour of the day had its allotted task, though singing and piano practice occupied the whole of every morning.

"Go on, go on, little singing bird! Try harder—harder yet!" the old man urged, firing her with his own wonderful enthusiasm; and Molly, responding to it, became more eagerly alive, more vibrant with sensitiveness and life in every fibre of her being.

The afternoons, when the weather became too warm to pursue her studies indoors, were spent with her books out in the forest, and the deep, booming voice of her patient teacher mingled with the sound of the stream and the cries of the forest creatures, and brought such peace and happiness that the young soul had never even dreamed of or imagined.

The wonderful world of literature and art and even science was opened up, little by little, to the ignorant back-woods girl, who, through her manner of life and great eagerness to learn, absorbed as much knowledge in a day as an ordinary schoolgirl would have gained in a month.

Jasper Ling was delighted with her progress and improvement which was becoming more and more marked each day.

Molly had entirely dropped the slang in which she had become so accustomed to express many of her thoughts, and if her manner of talking, modelled on that of her teacher, was a trifle too deliberate and archaic for her youth, it was pleasing, and a refreshing change from the poverty-stricken vocabulary of the girls of her own age in the towns and cities.

During the day Molly's hours were too crowded to admit of thoughts which were not imme-

diately relative to the task in hand; but at night, when her work was finished and she was alone in the little bedroom which Mrs. Clark and Leo had made so sweet and dainty for her, her thoughts were free, and always they roamed in one direction—to the man who had come into her life with such volcano-like force, who had been responsible—innocently, of course—for her first taste of the sweets of love, and who now was dead for ever to life, and love, and beauty.

"I want you, Jack! I want you!" the young girl sometimes cried, when his image seemed so clear that she could almost imagine him in the room with her.

Somebody has said that it is impossible to separate true lovers, for love throws a bridge across the widest spaces and the loved ones meet at will, and rejoice each in the presence of the other.

At these times—times when Molly felt as if she could rend the veil of Life asunder in order to make sure for herself of the news that Mrs. Minton had given her—the young girl doubted fiercely the fact of Jack Lorimer's death.

"He was so full of life, so noble and good to everything smaller and weaker than himself. God would not surely let him die," she would argue. But to refute this comforting thought came the recollection of the thousands of bright, brave, noble young men who had been allowed to die at the hands of a cruel, unchivalrous enemy, and then her hopes faded, for it seemed that goodness and nobility of heart had no more

purchase of life than wickedness and sin—in fact, not so much.

No, not all the education that she was acquiring so rapidly, not even the glorious certainty that her voice was making wonderful strides under its training, drowned the voice of Love in Molly's heart.

All that she was doing was a substitute—a splendid, worthy, absorbing substitute, it was true—but if Jack Lorimer by some miraculous means should suddenly reappear and ask her to go as his wife to some far-off, lonely spot on the edge of civilisation, she knew that she would cheerfully throw over all her culture and voice-training and follow him—barefoot, if need be—to the world's farthest ends.

With some natures, only the sunlight that has brightened the years of life are stored away for remembrance; the shadows fall behind, so far behind that they are lost sight of, and eventually forgotten.

Such a nature was Molly's. Her love for Jack Lorimer, her hero and ideal of all that a man should be, would ever be a great, glowing, glorious fact in her life; but her early years, those spent in the miserable shack with her step-father, the frequent thrashings that she had received at his hands, and the nights of singing and dancing to amuse a crowd of half-drunken men and women, all these memories were fading with the rapidity of a fire extinguished by a deluge of water.

Fading, too—though she sometimes pulled herself up with a shock—was the memory of

Dick Earle and the fact that she was, by law, his wife.

Only once had she spoken of the matter to Jasper Ling, who had listened sympathetically as ever to the whole pitiful little story.

Then he said, very slowly, as if carefully weighing every word, "Perhaps, when you are ready to go back into the world, he might be prevailed upon to release you from this knot which seems to have been tied so sorely against your will. I do not in the ordinary way approve of divorce—the marriage service, the most sacredly binding on earth, is far too lightly entered into and set aside in these strange days of rush and turmoil—but in your case, your marriage is a mockery, an empty ceremony. Certainly, if Mr. Earle is a man at all, he must see that, and he will give his permission for the severing of the bond."

Molly's eyes glowed and her heart grew lighter as she allowed herself to think that, some day, she would be free, and because she was little more than a child in years and had the happy faculty for storing only the sunshine of the past, Molly gradually forgot about the man who, at that moment, was setting in motion the machinery which was necessary to rob her of her inheritance.

Arrangements for the winter contracts under which Jasper Ling consented to sing had to be made in the summer. He always journeyed to New York to settle the business, as otherwise it would have meant that the agent would have been obliged to wait upon him, and that

would have led to the discovery of his secret retreat.

"I will be back the day after to-morrow, little one, without fail. Don't forget your singing practice, and if it is a good day you can do it in the open. Good-bye, and God bless you, always and ever, my little Molly," and for a second the old fellow gazed at the beautiful, blooming young girl with moistened eyes.

He loved her almost as if she had been his own daughter—the daughter he had always secretly longed for, but who had never come to bless his brief, bright, married life.

Molly clung to her benefactor, suddenly fearful, she did not know why, but she had a feeling that something terrible was bound to happen while he was away.

"Little foolish child, put away your fears, or I will be unhappy all the time that I am away," said Jasper Ling, fondly stroking Molly's hair and kissing her on the forehead as a loving father might have done.

Molly laughed, so as to give the impression of having obeyed the dear old man, but she felt an unaccountable sinking of the heart as she watched him disappear round a bend in the trail that led through the valley and forest, out on to the open prairie, and eventually to Oakham.

"It's so silly to feel like this. It is just because he has never left me before," thought Molly, in an endeavour to explain away her premonition of coming evil.

In the afternoon she took her lesson books out into the forest as usual, to a favourite spot under

a clump of redwoods which grew down by the stream.

It was very warm, and the clear water, reflecting the blue jewel-flowers that grew between the rocks which impeded its progress, looked very tempting. So laying aside her book, Molly stripped off her shoes and stockings and dangled her white, slender feet over the crystal-clear water, dipping them in every now and again.

She could not concentrate on her lessons that afternoon, and the singing of the forest birds moved her, too, to song. It was just a snatch of an old ballad that she had learned long ago, but the exquisite pathos which was the chief charm of Molly's voice made the words seem like living things as they fell tunefully from the red lips:

Love is just a morning glory,
Doomed at noon to die;
Love is only half a story,
Told in passing by.

A great clump of bushes grew at Molly's back. Suddenly there was a movement in the undergrowth which surrounded them, and the noise arrested her attention. Molly was about to get up in case anything harmful were concealed from her sight when, to her astonishment and alarm, a man appeared from behind the biggest bush, and he came towards her smilingly, hat in hand.

He was tall and, though his strange medley of garments—Panama hat, worn fustian breeches, out-at-elbows velvet coat and dusty boots did not add to his attractiveness—yet it was impossible

to disguise the imperious carriage and general air of breeding which quite precluded the possibility of his being a "bummer," or "tramp," as the professional beggar is called in England.

Molly noticed that the thick mouse-coloured hair swept a wide, nobly shaped forehead, and the brown eyes that looked at her so intently were quite kindly, though a little shifty, in expression.

The sun had tanned the clear English skin to a pleasant brown, and the silky moustache generously hid the weak, well-shaped mouth which so sadly belied the square, determined chin.

Joe Brownlow's square, determined chin, kindly eyes and muscular figure had worked his ruin.

The girls of his particular set had gushed over him because they "so loved a masterful man," and most of the sins that had been committed for the sole purpose of giving these young women a "good time," as they conceived it, really lay, not at the door of the easily imposed upon young man, but at theirs.

It was, however, quite out of the question to fix the blame of his ultimate downfall upon such fair, slight shoulders—nobody had been more shocked than the women friends who had taken valuable presents from him, well knowing that he was but an impecunious younger son—and when the family had packed the "disgrace," as they termed him, off to Canada with a small allowance, everybody was quite pleased and well satisfied.

But life in the part of Canada to which Joe Brownlow chose to emigrate had not helped to

" make a new man of him," which was the last pious wish of those who bade him a relieved " Good-bye." It had helped him many rungs down the ladder which leads to total and disgraceful extinction—so many, in fact, that there were not many more rungs to tread before the last one was reached.

But, nevertheless, each spring that came, with its glory of tender green and gold, its flowers and its scented sweetness, found some echo in the heart of the remittance man, who, if he had been rightly handled at the most critical period of his life, might have become one of the world's noblest men, for there was much gold mixed with the baser metal of his nature.

At heart Joe Brownlow was a poet and, paradoxical as it sounded, a lover of the good and beautiful, and when he disappeared from Oakham for a month or six weeks every year none of his rough, untutored associates knew that the old knapsack which he slung across his shoulder contained the greatest poets and books by the master minds of the world, which he had brought with him from England.

With his books, his own thoughts, and—who knows?—bitter regrets for company, the remittance man usually tramped through the forest and prairie land, allowing his steps to wander wherever they willed.

They had never before taken him in the direction of Misty Valley, because the place was almost hidden between ranges of high mountains and an extensive belt of forest land to the north.

He had stumbled quite by accident upon Jasper Ling's wildly beautiful forest home, and he had been puzzled by the sight of the charming, well-built house, so different from the rough shacks of pine or maple that he was accustomed to.

He walked cautiously round the verandah with the rose-covered supports, and peeped into a window which happened to be open.

What he saw caused the remittance man to swallow something hard and to brush his hand savagely across his eyes, telling himself that he was a blanked fool to care and to think of home.

A room panelled in stamped Cordovan leather, and furnished with rare and lovely objects of art. The furniture must have cost an enormous sum, and the uneven stucco ceiling showed a pattern of English rambler roses.

"I must—I will find out who lives here!" determined Joe Brownlow, as he prepared to go round to the front door and knock.

But at that moment a sweet, girlish voice upraised in most exquisite song fell on his ears.

It amazed and held spellbound the remittance man.

"That voice is trained, and beautifully trained, too. There's a mighty fortune in it if the owner is not already aware of the fact."

The sound guided the ready steps, and as Joe Brownlow made his way quickly through undergrowth and over rock and boulder a possible explanation of the apparent mystery came to him.

"Probably this is the country residence of a

famous actress," he mused, as he came nearer to the owner of the wonderful voice.

He was able to get a good view of Molly from behind the big clump of seed bushes before he made his presence known.

She was still singing the pathetic little song which, somehow, brought a feeling of tightness to his throat, and once she turned, so that he saw her face.

Instinctively, Joe Brownlow snatched off his hat, while his lips fell apart in sheer amazement.

"Heavens, what a face—what a face to be allied to such a voice!" he murmured; but he altered his opinion as to Molly's probable profession.

"I'll warrant she's never even seen the inside of a theatre, much less acted in one," he thought —a supposition which was perfectly correct.

He did not recognise Molly as the girl over whom he had performed a mock marriage ceremony almost a year ago.

Then Molly had been thinner, her face, though beautiful, worn with fright and utter weariness, and her clothes had been of an enveloping, disguising character.

Now she was clad in a loose, simple white cashmere frock that she had made for herself. Because it was so hot, and there was nobody to see her, the glossy curls fell in an ebony shower down to the slender waist, tied back with a broad bow that made Molly look nearer fourteen than eighteen, now her age.

Yet in spite of the fact that he had certainly never seen this beautiful young girl before, Joe

Brownlow felt that there was something vaguely familiar about her face and form.

The impression faded, however, when, suddenly ceasing to sing, Molly started up, her grey eyes filled with alarm, her lips falling a little apart, the small white teeth gleaming against the dark crimson like pearls.

Molly had a wonderful tonic effect, like a fresh sea-breeze, upon the remittance man.

At first he could only look at her; but his ready tongue soon came to his assistance.

"You will excuse me, I am sure, but your singing is the most beautiful thing I have heard since I left England," and Joe Brownlow bowed gracefully.

Molly stopped short, and slowly there crept over her face the loveliest blush that the remittance man had ever beheld. It lapped in great waves even to the roots of the shining hair, and suddenly Joe Brownlow, with wonderful insight, divined the cause.

The child was shy because she had taken off her shoes and stockings!

"The whitest feet that ever trod green grass," he told himself as, making an excuse, he fumbled in his knapsack, while Molly took advantage of his preoccupation to slip on her shoes and stockings with more rapidity than she had ever done in all her life before.

She was filled with a vague, unreasoning terror at the arrival of the stranger in Misty Valley. Such a thing had never before happened, and Molly felt the sunshine depart from the day and the sweetness from the song of the birds, though

the blue jays twittering joyously and the flaming red-and-yellow cardinals called unceasingly to their mates as they swung on the forest trees.

"Why shouldn't a stranger pass through the valley if he wishes?" Molly asked herself the question angrily as she tied her shoe lace, striving all the time to quiet her fears.

Unlike the remittance man, she saw nothing in him to remind her even vaguely of anybody that she had known, and when, like a devastating flood, recognition came, there was nothing whatsoever to prepare her for it.

While he was fumbling in his knapsack, pretending not to notice the kneeling girl, but in reality watching her all the time, the remittance man had been striving to sharpen up the wits that had become rusty for want of use in suitable society.

Suddenly he had what he thought was a wonderful inspiration, the very thing to tone with the chance meeting of a lovely girl in such idyllic surroundings.

Seating himself on a fallen trunk, with his still handsome face expressing a most flattering delight in her company, the remittance man said softly, "You were singing the words of a charming little poem just now—one that is rather a favourite of mine."

He waited for a few seconds, studying the flushed, confused little face, earnestly.

As some reply seemed to be necessary, Molly said, "Yes?" in a somewhat vague, questioning fashion.

Joe Brownlow leaned forward and smiled—the

girls in England had loved that sweet, winning smile of his.

"But you only sang one verse. Do you not know the other?" he questioned, pleasantly.

"No," admitted Molly, shyly. The snatch that she had sung was one of many snatches of different songs that she had heard her mother sing when she was a little child.

"Here is the other, then, and I think that it contradicts the first."

Joe Brownlow took from his pocket a small, worn book with a green *suède* cover, and, opening it, he read in a low, musical voice:

> Love is gold, so delicate
> The faintest flame would melt it—
> Love's nothing; but——
> God help the man who's never known or felt it!

As he finished he flung the book down on the grass beside him and looked for some expression of thanks, either in words or in the countenance of his beautiful little companion.

But his interested gaze changed to one of deepest concern, and his masculine mind at once jumped to the conclusion that Molly was ill.

The dark grey eyes were fixed, with a very horror of recollection in their depths, on the innocent looking little green book which lay open upon the grass, bringing back, in all its hideousness, the night that old Jasper Ling had striven so hard to make his young friend forget.

Molly's mind was an eddying blackness, her soul was tossed across raging billows like an egg-shell in the grip of a cyclone.

Being so sensitive, the young girl suffered such torment as a strong man would hardly have felt, and her voice was hoarse, startling the man who listened as much as if she had suddenly clapped a revolver to his head, when, at long last, she spoke.

"I—I know who you are. You are the Registrar at Oakham—the man who married me to Richard Earle, and—but you'll not tell him where I am, will you? Will you?"

Molly looked so pitifully beautiful as she pleaded with the dusty, shabby remittance man, taking his arm between her white, agitated little fingers as she did so; it seemed absurd to connect the idea of marriage with her.

But now recollection came over Joe Brownlow with an ugly rush.

Looking closely into the piteous, eager young face the mists cleared from his mind, and he recalled perfectly the bride who was supposed to have committed suicide.

It was not much to salve a conscience that was already sadly soiled, but at that moment the remittance man felt glad from the very depths of his being that he had thrown back into Dick Earle's face the money that he had paid him for performing the mock ceremony in place of the dead official.

"But—but whatever made you run away from your husband, Mrs. Earle, and pretend that you had committed suicide?" asked Joe Brownlow, in a pained, perplexed voice.

Molly shuddered as her married name fell upon her ears, and then, with tragic simplicity,

pointed to the green *suède* book which lay on the grass at their feet.

"That," she said.

"How?" asked the man, knitting his brows.

"Do you care to listen to the most miserable, sordid story that ever a girl had to tell?" asked Molly, looking levelly into the brown eyes that were no longer shifty, but only very, very pitying and kind.

She no longer seemed like an innocent, trusting child, in spite of the soft features and long, hanging hair; rather she looked like a woman who had gone through Sorrow's fiery furnace, to emerge finer and stronger, but saddened for all time.

Somehow the remittance man felt very closely drawn to the little stranger who seemed so utterly alone; he felt a strong, chivalrous desire to champion her cause, whatever it might be, and however hazardous were the risks to be run.

"Tell me," he said, putting out his hand and gently touching Molly's.

"Oh, it is only a few words, Mr.—Mr.——"

Molly paused.

"Brownlow—Joe Brownlow is the name I took when I came out here. It isn't my own, but it will do. Go on, Mrs. Earle," said the remittance man, sympathetically.

Molly winced, but continued in a low, sometimes unsteady voice, clasping her hands lightly around her knees and looking into the blue, sunlit distance, "I was brought out here when I was only a few months old, and I have no recollection of my father. When I was four

years of age my mother married again—a great brute of a man, quite different from herself, for my mother was the gentlest, most lovable woman that ever lived."

Molly's voice broke as she thought of the lonely grave on the hill-side at Lone Pine Station, without a single flower or leaf upon it, now that she was gone, and the big brown hand of the remittance man closed gently over hers.

"I know. I had a mother—once," he said, in a voice that would have caused his drunken associates some surprise could they have heard it.

"My stepfather kept me, after a fashion, after she died, thrashing me when he was drunk and abusing me when he was sober, for the food that I consumed. Then Mr. Earle came along and—and he offered to marry me, to take me away to England, where he has a beautiful house with a garden and servants, and oh! all the things that I have seen since and learned to appreciate, but I had only dreamed about them, then," said Molly, in a low voice.

"Well, any girl would be glad to leave a brute like that and make tracks for England. Why didn't you go?" asked the remittance man, with simple masculine directness.

Molly's white cheeks flushed, but, as she had resolved to throw herself on the mercy of this man, who could so easily, she supposed, communicate with her husband, she felt that she had better tell him the whole story, keeping back nothing that was of importance.

"I—I—Love came, Mr. Brownlow. There was a man—his name was Jack Lorimer." The

grey eyes filled as the dear name passed the twitching lips, and Joe Brownlow suddenly felt furiously antagonistic towards this Jack Lorimer, whoever he was, but he softened towards him when Molly had finished her pitiful little story.

"He was a brave, splendid man—a V.C. hero in the war—and he rescued me from a drunken bully who tried to make me kiss him in the saloon where I used to sing and dance," Molly went on, bravely.

"Yes?" questioned Joe Brownlow, a trifle abruptly.

"I fell in love with him, and now he's dead!" finished Molly, as simply as a child, and as poignant in its unconscious misery as stories of childish suffering so often are.

She told him of her scorn for Dick Earle when he showed himself a coward and a drunkard, and she laid bare her whole aching, sorrowful little heart for the man to figuratively gaze upon.

But though the remittance man was sympathetic, he felt himself in a quandary, for he could not, for his own sake, put an end to the girl's misery by telling her that the whole ceremony was a fraud and that he had assisted in it for payment which he had afterwards returned.

Almost certainly it would lead to complications, and if the whole affair were to be investigated his share in it would not escape punishment, for local feeling had run very high over the supposed death of the young and beautiful bride; and indeed Dick Earle had only narrowly escaped severe handling from the men

and women of Oakham, who had, not unnaturally, drawn their own conclusions from the tragic little note that had been left behind.

So Joe Brownlow crushed the chivalrous impulse to tell Molly the truth about her marriage, but he was determined not to let this be his last visit to Misty Valley.

He plied the white-faced, anxious girl with questions concerning her life in the charming house into which he had taken a peep, and Molly, unused to evasion, told Joe Brownlow everything that he wanted to know, including the fact that the owner of it—Jasper Ling, the famous musician—was educating her mind and training her voice so that one day she would be enabled to earn her own living.

"But if my husband finds me out he'll compel me to go with him, and—and I'd rather kill myself!" finished Molly, her grey eyes flashing with the scorn that fired her bosom and rang coldly in her clear young voice.

All women despise a physical coward, and, as a rule, the softer and more truly feminine the woman, the greater her insistence upon bravery in the man that desires her for a mate.

Molly was very much a woman, and her charm for the remittance man was heightened by her trust in him and her appeal to his strength and forbearance.

"He shan't find you, Mrs. Earle, if it rests with me, I assure you. But," and Joe Brownlow's voice grew very soft and persuasive, "I must be rewarded for my silence."

A look of shame crept into Molly's eyes. Her

mind. deduced only one thing from her companion's words. He wanted her to buy his silence, and she had not a penny in the world!

"I—I haven't any money, Mr. Brownlow, and I'm afraid there's nothing I could give you of any value which you could sell. . . ."

The man, flushing hotly beneath his tan, interrupted the faltering little sentence by saying, roughly, "Who spoke of money? I wouldn't touch a penny of any woman's money if I were gasping! All I want is to be allowed to come and talk to you sometimes, to read to you, and with you, if you'll let me, and perhaps I might also be of use to you in your studies. Heavens! You don't know what life is like for a fellow. . . ."

He stopped suddenly, as if conscious of the fact that he had said too much, disconcerted by Molly's clear, candid grey eyes which were regarding him so steadily.

"Certainly you may come and read with me, if Mr. Ling does not mind. I shall have to ask him, you see," said Molly, hesitatingly, well knowing that her kind old friend would disapprove, and yet hardly liking to refuse any request on the part of the man who was doing her so great a favour.

"Never mind Mr. Ling—come," ordered Joe Brownlow, in a voice which betrayed in every note his anxiety to see more of his lovely little companion.

"To-morrow, at this time?" persisted the man, holding out his hand as Molly rose, gathered her lessons together and prepared to depart.

"I don't know—I'll try—I wish Mr. Ling were at home," stammered Molly, but at the finish she gave the promise that the remittance man so much desired, walking slowly through the forest towards the house with anxious, fear-clouded eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV

"WHY are you so good to me, Mr. Minton? There must be dozens of men my senior in your employ, all of them better fitted than I to undertake an important job like this."

There was modest self-depreciation mingled with sincere gratitude in the voice of the young man who spoke.

Jack Lorimer, contrary to everybody's expectations, did not die, though often enough, during the heart-sick nights and long, weary days, he had longed and prayed for the sleep of the grave.

He did not know that the fair, slender girl who daily grew more beautiful beneath Love's tender sway, and who nursed him so devotedly, went from his side each night whispering prayers that his recovery might be swift and permanent, and that some of the eager, throbbing passion in her own heart might awaken a response in his.

"He is so pathetically grateful for all that is done for him, but he never gives the slightest hint of anything beyond," said Grace Minton, when her cousin asked whether she was making any progress in a certain much desired direction.

Jimmy Minton had been like a madman for a

few days after his friend had brought him the report about Molly's supposed suicide.

In common with everybody else, he judged the whole affair by the external facts, and his genuinely tortured spirit accepted the death of the girl he had loved so passionately for a few brief, bright days in all faith.

But not so Jack Lorimer, before whose eyes was ever the image of the young girl who had stolen into his heart on the night when he had rescued her from the attentions of a drunken bully in Jacques Gaspard's whisky saloon.

He never breathed Molly's name, but Grace Minton knew, as surely as if the information had been shouted into her ears, that he was thinking of Molly all the time that she was showering upon him the attentions which her heart dictated.

Mrs. Minton, heartily tired of the sick-room atmosphere of Log House and the town generally—for the little hospital was still full—bethought herself of a friend who lived in Ottawa, whither she departed, leaving an elderly governness, who had taught Grace as a child, to take her place.

At the present time Jimmy Minton, who rather luxuriated in and analysed the symptoms of his grief, was disposed to be very kindly and sympathetic towards his cousin's hopeless passion for Jack Lorimer.

"Because the girl I love has been the victim of such a vile hound as that fellow, Earle—he killed her, the scum, as surely as if he had murdered her by forcing her into that marriage!—

there is no reason why you should not be happy, if only you can make him forget."

"Yes, that's it, Jimmy. If only I can make him forget!"

Grace Minton repeated her cousin's words bitterly. They were standing together in the wide, sunlit hall, and Grace was resting one slim white hand on the back of the dark oak settle in which Molly had been placed by her cousin on that eventful evening last winter when he had met her trudging along the road to Jack Lorimer's lodgings.

She looked very fair and beautiful, and the young mineowner, though he was not in the least in love with his cousin, privately felt a little piqued that a fellow like Jack Lorimer—one of his own employés, too—should not rise to the bait of her attractions.

But suddenly it came to him that there might be an extremely substantial reason why the young miner did not warm more to his cousin's friendly overtures.

"Naturally enough, if he has no prospects he wouldn't be such a fool as to make love to any girl. And it's no good offering the fellow charity. Work is the only way of helping him," he mused.

Grace Minton's heart went out in gratitude to her cousin when he suggested that he should offer Jack the post of head overseer of a big new copper mine that was being sunk some miles out of the district—a post which would yield a salary that would be ample for a young couple to start housekeeping upon, if they did not aim too high.

"Oh, if that *is* the obstacle, Jimmy!" breathed the lovesick girl, ecstatically.

Then, because the wish was, in her case, so very much father to the thought, she persuaded herself that Jack's voice and manner towards her had often been curiously repressed, as if he were keeping a tight reign over himself.

It was nearly six months since the accident in the mine, but, on one pretext and another, Grace had managed to keep Jack Lorimer as a guest at Log House, even though his leg had made a rapid recovery, and there was now really very little the matter with him.

Several times had the young miner asked permission to return to his work, but always Jimmy Minton had put him off with a light, laughing refusal.

"I've other plans for you, Lorimer, but they are not yet ready," he said on the last occasion, which happened to be just after his conversation with his cousin.

Six months ago, if those words had fallen from the young mineowner's lips, they would have filled Jack Lorimer with unspeakable delight; they would have opened the gates of an earthly paradise, for would they not have brought Molly nearer, and have signified a future filled with joy.

But ambition no longer soared to the skies and tempted him to scale impossible heights.

He heard his employer with dull, almost uninterested ears, and though he was respectful, he was almost unenthusiastic in his reception of the good news. Indeed, he doubted whether it

was quite fair and honest of him to accept such an important, lucrative appointment when there were so many men, years his senior in experience, as well as age, who must have been waiting long and patiently for just such an opportunity as this.

He was qualified to take the job—he knew that perfectly well. For ever since he had first met Molly he had been constantly studying and striving to improve his knowledge of the higher branches of his work. He had also acquired culture of another sort, since he had been a guest at his employer's house, and it was now a very rare thing for the young miner to make even a small grammatical error, while his natural kindliness endowed him with the faultless manners which were part and parcel of him, and which there had been no need for him to acquire.

He was so handsome, so virile, so strong, such a king amongst men, that he was above all petty distinctions of class, for Jack Lorimer was a born leader, and not a follower of men, Grace Minton told herself, thrilling with love and pride.

"No, I have talked the matter over with my manager, and he is of the same opinion as myself that you are the man for the job, and it will be up to you, Lorimer, to justify the confidence that we both have in you."

Jimmy Minton put out his hand as he spoke.

Jack Lorimer gripped hard, a sudden tightness of his throat preventing him from saying more than, "Thank you, sir."

Dimly he saw the reason for this great kindness, or, at least, he thought that he did.

"He's doing it to encourage me, to help me to

get over Molly's loss. He loved her, too. I must not forget that." Jack Lorimer told himself these things with all the simplicity of the man who is great in essential things.

He stammered out his thanks, and intimated that the sooner he could start his new duties the better pleased would he be.

"You can go down to-morrow with Jackson, if you like," said Jimmy Minton, hoping, by precipitating Jack Lorimer's departure, to bring another matter to a head.

Grace Minton noted, with a little flutter at her heart, that some of the heavy, apathetic calm had disappeared from the countenance of the man she so dearly loved, when Jack went back to the little room where the members of the household generally spent the morning.

Grace was alone. The sun glinted on her fair hair, bringing out all its golden lights, and threw up the charm of her clear pink and white complexion, undefiled by cosmetics of any sort. Altogether she was a pleasing, wholesome specimen of British girlhood, aud the desire of every human heart is for friendship.

One can bear grief, but it takes two to be glad, and in the depths of his lonely, miserable heart Jack Lorimer wanted somebody to be pleased that he had won promotion.

With a smile lighting up his face—the first smile that Grace had seen for months—he came towards her with outstretched hand.

"I've been chosen as manager of the new copper mine, Miss Grace, and some of the ideas that I have suggested in the last few months to

your cousin are to be tested. Please say that you are glad," he finished, with an odd, wistful little inflection in his voice.

Perhaps he held Grace Minton's hand for a second longer than he thought; perhaps it was the touch of the man she loved that sent the blood rioting through the girl's veins, making her oblivious to all things save the one mighty, devastating fact of her love.

Carrying the hand that she held to her lips, Grace Minton covered it with passionate kisses. She sank on one knee in her complete self-surrender, and, still holding Jack Lorrimer's hand, cried wildly, " Oh, why won't you give me the right to be always glad, always happy, with you? Are you blind that you haven't seen all these months how much I love you, Jack? I—I've loved you from the very first, but you only had eyes for Molly—Molly Osborne, the girl who flirted with you, and then took her life by her own hand. Can't you forget her, Jack? Can't you try to forget her, and love me instead? "

Grace Minton's voice faded away in a little gasping sob. There were tears in her eyes; the naked sunlight streaming through the open window showed them to the man who looked upon them with such a wild tornado of emotions in his heart, tearing him, without mercy, in a thousand different directions.

He was astonished, hurt, sorrowful, humiliated, and passionately angry, all at one and the same time.

Perhaps anger was his chief emotion, because this girl, kneeling to him, having voluntarily come

down from her high woman's altitude, had dared to speak slightingly of the girl he loved, whom he would always love, living or dead, while a breath remained in his body.

It was the second time that Grace had done it; he could not help remembering that, even though so many other emotions were racking him. Perhaps, if she had not mentioned Molly's name, or at least if she had spoken of her with respect, that fact might eventually have led her to the goal of her desire; that is, if Jack Lorimer could have been convinced that Molly was really dead and had been willing to let friendship take the place of love in his life.

As it was, very gently but firmly Jack Lorimer bent down and, raising the kneeling, somewhat hysterical girl, said in a low, pained voice, "Miss Minton, no man is worthy of the honour of having a woman kneel at his feet. I am truly, honestly sorry if you really mean the things that you have said. But you—you don't mean them. You can't. Why, look at the difference between us?" he said, simply, just as if he were an elder brother trying to point out to a stupid little sister some act of supreme folly.

Grace had subsided into an arm-chair, and the sense of what she had done, of how ineffably cheap she must appear in the eyes of the man she loved, came to her with crushing, shameful force.

But she need not have felt quite so keenly as she did. Love has so little regard for poverty or riches, class or caste, and it was not the young girl's fault that she had fallen a victim to its siren voice and intoxicating sweetness,

Grace Minton was not a flirt; if she had been her sense of degradation would not have been so profound.

Even the fact that she had been willing to fight a rival with any weapon at hand for the sake of her love, did not prove that she was utterly bad. Women have fought for their men right down the ages with the fierceness of a tigress fighting for its cubs.

Jack Lorimer stood, hands dug deeply into his pockets, his fine eyes smouldering with resentment that Molly's name should have been dragged into the matter, looking down awkwardly at the shamefaced girl, not knowing what on earth to say or to do.

Suddenly the blue eyes, still swimming in tears, were raised to his. Grace Minton spoke, and all the young girl's shame that had suddenly overwhelmed her was in her voice.

"I—I'm afraid that I do mean all that I said, Mr. Lorimer—every word." Her voice throbbed with the ache that was in her heart. "But I don't know what you must think of me for letting myself go like this! I couldn't h-help it!" And the young voice broke in a pitiful little sob which was caused by a sudden involuntary intake of the breath.

It touched the big, strong, awkward-looking man as nothing else could possibly have done, that little, helpless sob. It let loose the flood of human sympathy with which he was so richly endowed, and swallowed up every other emotion.

Jack Lorimer went and stood beside the arm-

chair in which Grace lay huddled, and he gently touched her shoulder.

"Don't make yourself so miserable, Miss Grace. Don't think that I'm vain enough to take seriously all that you've said this morning. You are only a young girl, and some day you will meet the right man, somebody very different from me, I assure you." And Jack Lorimer did his best to coax a smile back to the white, tragic face of the girl whose love for himself was far deeper than he knew.

When after infinite trouble he had succeeded, he ran swiftly up to his room to pack the few possessions—books on mining engineering, tools, etc.—that had been sent on from his lodgings to Log House, and he did his best to forget the scene that had just taken place in the morning-room below.

"Of course she isn't really in love with me; she's possibly in love with the V.C. that I was lucky enough to get—young girls seem to imagine that the winners of military decorations are not ordinary flesh and blood, like other men. If they only knew how many thousands of times the V.C. was won even in one day!" And the young miner permitted himself a rare indulgence—that of reliving his past as a soldier for a few minutes.

Meantime, Grace Minton was making her pitiful little confession of failure to her cousin, who came in soon after Jack Lorimer's departure.

It was impossible to avoid telling him, for he immediately noticed Grace's red eyes and tear-stained cheeks.

"Hallo! Been settling it between you?" he asked, amiably, thinking that possibly, since girls were so inexplicable in most of their ways, that this was only his cousin's manner of being joyful.

"No. I—oh, Jimmy, I've made such an entire fool of myself! But I couldn't help it, though I'd like to cut my tongue out now, when it's too late," said Grace, in a tone of fierce regret.

She told her cousin everything, since to confide in somebody was a burning necessity, and there was nobody else but Jimmy.

"He'll never even respect me in future, will he, Jimmy? As for the other—well!" and a hopeless shrug finished the sentence.

Jimmy Minton's reply was certainly more frank than soothing; but then, he was not in love with the girl who, at that moment, was suffering and smarting so severely under the lash which she had made for herself.

"Well, it's no good blinking the fact that you've put the lid on it, so to speak. A fellow hates a girl to come within a dozen miles of proposing to him—it's the job Nature intended him for from the time that he lay in his cradle, and a girl goes down with a bang in his eyes when she tries to take his job away from him."

Graced winced, and her cousin saw it. Immediately he repented for having spoken his mind so freely.

"But as for saying that he'll not be able to respect you that's all bosh, old girl. Look here," he continued, with a flash of that tender consideration which made him such a favourite with his fair friends, "if you have a couple of weeks to

yourself, without anybody who knows that you care for the fellow hanging around, it'll help you to forget. It seems that you've got to knuckle under to the fact that love can't be forced. I'll clear out and take Lorimer down to the mine myself. We'll both be gone by lunch-time, so good-bye, old girl." Obeying a sudden impulse, born of his own sympathy and sense of comradeship for the pathetic, huddled-up little figure, Jimmy Minton bent over his cousin, who was still in the arm-chair, and dropped a kiss lightly on her forehead.

"Good-bye, Jimmy, dear, and—and thank you for being such a brick, although it wasn't any good," said Grace, in a low, choked whisper, putting out a hand to shake that of her cousin, but not rising to bid him "Good-bye."

If Grace Minton could have known, as she followed the tall young figure with her eyes, that it was the last time that they were to behold her cousin in life she would have put aside her sorrow, great as it was to her at the time, and have used all the means at her command to prevent him from leaving the safety of his own home.

CHAPTER XXV

MOLLY, in her fresh white gown and big sunhat, swinging by a ribbon on her arm, made an exquisite picture of healthy girlhood as she made her way through the tangle of silvery hawksweed, yellow columbines, and tall, lush grasses to the little spot by the forest stream where, nearly a week ago, she had first met Joe Brownlow.

The few days had made a wonderful difference to the remittance man, both outwardly and inwardly. He had pitched his camp in the forest, quite near to the charming house that he was longing to explore, and every morning he bathed in the stream, making himself quite spruce and smart by the time that Molly, having done her singing and piano practice, came out into the forest with her lesson books to study.

With many shakings of his woolly head, the old negro servant imparted to Molly the news that, contrary to his expectations, his master would be absent for over a week.

Thus it was impossible for her to introduce her new acquaintance to her benefactor, a fact which troubled Molly greatly, though she did her best to throw off the feeling of uneasiness and foreboding of evil that persisted in remaining with her.

As she neared the chosen spot for her studies, Joe Brownlow, with an eager light in his eyes, rose up from the tree trunk on which he was sitting to greet her.

He raised his shabby Panama hat with the grace of a courtier doing homage to his queen, and flung away the cigarette that he had been smoking.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that, Mr. Brownlow! Why, it's hardly smoked at all," reproached Molly, her grey eyes following the almost intact cigarette as it fell amongst the tall, softly swaying grasses.

"In England we never talk to a lady with a cigarette stuck in the mouth, and there's no reason why it should be done here. It's very rude."

"Is it?" questioned Molly, innocently. She knew little or nothing about European manners, but it seemed pleasant, all the same, that a man should be willing to make a sacrifice of a whole cigarette just because he had to speak to her.

She sat down demurely upon the broad pine trunk, and opened the book of English history that she was studying.

All learning was a revelation to the little untaught backwoods girl, but most of all Molly loved history.

She relived those stirring times, and invested with eager, glowing, pulsing life every character that appealed to her imagination.

Generally, while she studied, Joe Brownlow read the books that he had brought with him, but he was always ready to break off and explain anything which his charming little companion

failed to understand; and he delighted in the rapidity and aptness of his pupil.

But the relationships between himself and Molly were too idyllic to last for long.

From the first he had known, subconsciously if in no other way, that his discovery of the girl who was supposed by all to be dead could only end in one way.

Many and many a time, when Molly was sleeping, the man whose little rough tent was pitched outside in the forest would be walking beneath the stars, a prey to the most hideous remorse for having yielded to Dick Earle's money and persuasions.

He lashed himself unmercifully with the whips of his own scorn, but the deeper he sank into the mire of self-condemnation the stronger and mightier grew his passion for the girl who roused every ounce of the latent good within him, and appealed to all that was highest in a manhood which was by no means as despicable as it seemed.

This morning, while Molly busied herself with her studies, quite oblivious to the mighty rein which her companion was finding it necessary to put upon himself, Joe Brownlow studied every line of the pure little profile with eager, love-hungry eyes.

"If only I were more worthy," he groaned inwardly, over and over again.

When Molly came towards him, her sun hat swinging on her arm and her books in her little hand, she had made such a delightful picture amongst the flowers, in her white dress, with the mountains and the forest behind and around her.

As the vision once again imprinted itself upon his senses, he became conscious of an overwhelming, intolerable pain.

Between her, the sweetly serious, almost childishly innocent girl, and him was an abyss, an array of profitless years which it was impossible to bridge.

As he gave himself up to the misery of his musings the vision of Molly in her present surroundings faded, and in his mind's eye he saw her, white and heart-sick, as she must have been, stretched out on the miserable bed in the mean, squalid shack that disgraced the sacred name of home.

He saw his own future, always weighted with the burden of the secret of Molly's mock marriage.

"If I confess, the price will be a stiff term of imprisonment, and even then I've nothing to prove what I assert, unless the half-breed, who, by the way, has taken himself off, can be found and made to confess that he, too, was in Dick Earle's pay. And if I know anything of his kind, he'll do nothing of the sort. Oh, what a hopeless mess it all is!"

The more Joe Brownlow thought, the thicker seemed to be the maze which hemmed him in as the result of one mad, half-drunken action, which had, after all, gone unrewarded.

Naturally, he argued, Dick Earle could, on the face of things, claim to be the husband of the girl who was studying history so calmly and with such evident enjoyment by his side.

But then, through the murky gloom which

obsessed him, a ray of hope suddenly shone with the brilliance of a rainbow after a storm.

"It may be that he has married again, supposing Molly to be dead, and he'll hardly want to flaunt the fact that the girl is alive in the face of his present wife, if he has one. If I only knew!"

The sight of Molly, free yet believing herself to be bound, maddened him; he felt so utterly hopeless.

Yet a strong love, seizing an object firmly, ardently, is conscious of a mighty power, treasured up in its own fervour, and always, in imagination, it achieves the impossible, and makes that which is most difficult of performance seem trivial.

Joe Brownlow—that was not his name; in reality, he bore the name of one of the oldest, if impoverished, families in England—was merciless in his own self-loathing, but the voice of Hope was as the voice of the spring in his soul, and he wondered if Love could not make a path even for such erring feet as his.

"Will you explain this bit of history to me, please, Mr. Brownlow?"

"Molly's voice, clear and musical as that of the lark that was pouring out its soul in song, broke in upon the tangled skein of his thoughts.

Her dark grey eyes looked so seductive, her red lips so alluring, as she gravely asked the question.

Joe Brownlow's passion broke all bounds and overmastered him in one mad, fleeting second.

Before Molly had time to move a step she felt herself caught in the man's arms and pressed

fiercely against his breast, while hot, passionate kisses rained down upon her frightened face.

Little, incoherent, but terribly sincere avowals of love escaped Joe Brownlow's lips in jerky, uneven sentences.

"Explain history to you, blood of my heart? Let us *make* history together, you and I, little love of all the world! Oh, I want you—do you hear, child?—I want you to love me!"

Molly lay, unresisting, like a little figure of wax, in the strong arms that held her.

She was terror-stricken and very, very angry with the man who, seemingly, had taken such an unfair advantage of the fact that she was in his power, and that she was, for the time being, all alone.

Only once before had she been kissed like this, and that was when Dick Earle asked her to go away with him, as his wife, to England.

Yet, when Joe Brownlow released her, it was not of him, nor of Dick Earle, that she thought, but Jack—Jack Lorimer, who had never spoken to her of love, and who would never in this world do so!

Her eyes were flashing, and her cheeks were one huge, burning blush as she turned angrily upon the remittance man.

"You—you coward! You mean, despicable creature!" she said, in a low, choked voice, hardly knowing what words her tongue was articulating.

She looked taller than she really was, standing there by the laughing stream, her young body held taut, her head thrown back, and her small

hands, which had grown very white, unconsciously clenching and unclenching themselves as she spoke.

Joe Brownlow thought that she looked like some beautiful, angry young princess, and even though he was already regretting his momentary madness as it had frightened Molly, he could not find it in his heart to regret the fact that, for a few ecstatic seconds, he had held the sweet body in his arms and snatched kisses from the pure little lips.

His face flushed beneath its tan, and his eyes kindled brightly, but his tone was humble enough even to take some of the smart out of Molly's sore, rankling heart.

"Molly, you called me by some hard names just now, and perhaps I deserve them all. But at least, I am not a liar. I spoke God's own truth just now when I told you that I loved you. I do love you, little girl, and if you'll let me straighten out the mess that I have made of things, why, a new life will be mine, and who knows that I may yet be able to go back to England and hold my head up amongst decent men and women once again?"

His tone was supplicating, eager, hopeful, all at one and the same time.

Looking at his handsome face, lighted up from within by the fire which consumed him, Molly felt thrilled, for, ignorant as she was, she knew that she was looking upon a man who had it in him to become great, and strong, and good, if only he would conquer his own weaknesses.

"If I had you to work for, you to live for, if

I could always refresh myself at the fountain of your goodness and beauty, I—I would scale the heights until I reached the stars. I would make you the proudest woman in all the world, heart's love. I want you to marry me, dearest," he concluded, forgetting in his wild passion that he had not as yet enlightened Molly.

The young girl grew first red, and then white as death. What was this man saying? Was he mad, that he asked her to marry him, when he knew perfectly well that he had himself tied the knot which bound her for ever to Dick Earle—for ever, until " death do us part " ; and the sacred words rang like a funeral knell in the ears of the girl as she recalled them in all their solemn significance.

At last she found her tongue, after centuries it seemed to her, and she could even find it in herself to pity the man who was looking at her so strangely, with such eager, love-hungry eyes, as he waited with impatient patience, as it seemed, for her answer.

When it came it was only a little, faltering shamed whisper, but because it represented the very object which he had in his power to clear away, the heart of the remittance man leaped within him, and the little bird of hope began trilling its joyous song.

" You forget, Mr. Brownlow, that it is impossible for me ever to think of love. I—oh, you surely haven't forgotten that I am married, when it was you who performed the ceremony ! "

The world stopped still for Molly Osborne, the forest became dark, although the sun was

flooding the trees with gold, and the many-hued flowers vied with each other in lending colour to the landscape, when, leaning towards her, with burning eyes and voice thick with emotion, Joe Brownlow spoke the words which set her free.

"You are not married, Molly! You were deceived, cruelly and wickedly deceived, by that marriage service. It was no more legal than if the keeper of the local whisky saloon had performed it."

The wild joy which was to take possession of Molly, like that of a slave who has suddenly been presented with his freedom, had not yet entered her being.

But the significance of the words had sunk into her consciousness, and after the first shock she was able to follow Joe Brownlow's story in every detail.

"I was paid for my share in the filthy business, and so was Thomas, Mr. Raeburn's half-breed servant. The entries in the books are forged, and so is the certificate. I didn't have anything to do with that—I simply impersonated the dead man and signed the certificate as one of the witnesses."

The remittance man had lost the look of eager, vital purposefulness which had made him look a different being while he was declaring his love for Molly. His face was haggard and drawn, and his eyes seemed to mirror every hope that had risen and died within his soul throughout his life.

Great as was the wrong that he had done her, Molly could not help feeling compassion for him.

She touched the sleeve of the old velvet coat which the man wore; her eyes were very tender, and her voice was very kind, more like that of a mother who pardons a weak but lovable child than that of a person who has been deeply injured.

"You must not feel so hopeless, Mr. Brownlow; indeed, as it has turned out, you have done me a service. If you had not performed that ceremony I should never have come to Misty Valley, never have known the dear man who has been like a father to me—at least, like the father of my dreams, for I have never known what it feels like to have a real father."

The remittance man seized the little soft hand and covered it with kisses.

"My little white saint!" he murmured, so low that Molly did not catch the words.

"If I confess, and wipe out the crime by serving whatever sentence the law passes upon me, will you help me to build up a new life afterwards? Will you, Molly—will you?"

The eager, insistent voice brought Molly back from the haven of joy into which she had by that time passed.

Somebody has said that the virtue of putting others before oneself is one which belongs to the tender twilight of middle age and the starry close of life, and that it is only natural for youth to be selfish.

Whether that is true or not, the fact remains that Molly had completely forgotten that the man at her side loved her.

She was revelling in her joy, thinking of a thousand things, allowing nebulous, fantastic

plans for the future to drift through her mind, now that she was free to roam the whole world, if she wished.

But Joe Brownlow's anxiously spoken question brought her at once from her soaring heights to the lowest depths.

"I am ever so sorry, Mr. Brownlow, but it is impossible for me to make you happy in—in the way you wish. You—you need not go to prison, though, for what you have done. Now that you have told me, it is sufficient. If ever Mr. Earle tries to claim me as his wife I will tell him what I know, and then, of course, it will be impossible for him to do anything," said Molly, gently.

"I'm afraid, little one, that it isn't quite so simple as all that," said Joe Brownlow, with a sad smile.

"You see," he continued, speaking very slowly, and choosing simple words, as if he were explaining a difficult lesson to a child, "If Dick Earle wants you, so long as he remains unmarried he can claim you, because, on the face of things, his certificate and the entries in the books at Oakham are quite in order. Moreover, the people at Lone Pine Station, who gave you your trousseau, your stepfather—the hound told me the whole story of how he met you—could all prove that you left the place for the express purpose of getting married."

Molly's little face clouded and lost a good deal of its brightness; her grey eyes grew big and very wistful, for she did not want this man, who had brought her such joyful news, to suffer imprisonment—although she had to admit that he deserved

it—especially when she could not give him the reward he begged for when the past was wiped out.

"Your own signature is on the document that the fellow holds, if you remember," the pathetic, patient voice went on, as if anxious to show Molly how deeply tangled was the skein which had been woven around her freedom. "Unless he has married again—in which case he will be helpless, and we shall hold the upper hand—he can claim you as his wife," finished Joe Brownlow.

"C-couldn't we find out whether he is married or not?" asked Molly, miserably.

"Only by concealing our hand, and sending or going to England to find out," replied the remittance man, positively.

"Well, then, I'm afraid that it cannot be done, for I have not a penny in all the world," confessed Molly.

She saw her little castle of dreams fading like a soap-bubble when it has burst.

If she had to marry Joe Brownlow in order to free herself in the eyes of the law from the man who held her signature to a forged document, it was only a matter of changing her chains.

What was the man at her side saying in such an eager, pleading voice? The words came to Molly's ears like a voice in the far-off distance.

"But if he isn't married, little girl, and if he still loves you, in his own fashion, and wants you? You'd have to go to him, you know. The law would compel you."

The words, quietly spoken though they were, had a tremendous force behind them, and sud-

denly Molly was stricken with panic; a wild, unreasoning terror possessed her lest, even then, the man who was nothing to her in reality, but who, unless Joe Brownlow confessed, was her husband in the eyes of the law, should appear before her and claim her and order her to go away with him at once.

As a matter of fact, Molly's illness was not far enough away to allow such intensive nerve shocks as those which she was having to be borne with impunity.

It was sheer panic which caused her to suddenly veer round, so that Joe Brownlow's offer seemed like a blessed haven of refuge, and to say, "I'll do anything—anything you wish, if only you free me from Dick Earle!"

The remittance man knelt at the feet of the frightened girl and called her all the endearments that he knew.

The light of a great resolve, heralding the dawn of the new life which was to be, shone in his face and wiped out all that was cynical and unworthy for the moment.

"I'll have to work my way across, but I'll do it on a tramp steamer that is due to pass Oakham to-morrow morning, if they'll take me. My little love, stay here with the old man who is so kind to you, and watch for my return. As soon as I get to know anything, I'll write. Good-bye, my little white lily-girl. Just one kiss—only one!"

The impassioned man raised the drooping face, which was as white as the flower to which he had likened it, and pressed a long, lingering kiss upon the ice-cold lips.

Molly watched him go, she saw him pack his few possessions and she listened, with a heart that seemed to have stopped beating, until his steps died away on the trail that led through the valley and over the open prairie, back to Oakham.

Her books lay forgotten at her side, the birds chattered and sang above and all around her; but books and the songs of birds were alike forgotten.

A dull, crushing weight seemed to have descended upon the heart that was light and happy until Jasper Ling went away; misfortune seemed to have dated from that morning, a week ago, when she had kissed the old man good-bye and watched him ride away!

"I was learning to forget! I had almost forgotten!" cried the frightened girl, and then, as she lay at full length on the soft grass, looking blindly into the clear bright water, she suddenly remembered that her benefactor had hinted that perhaps her marriage might be set aside by law if all was explained.

Realisation of what she had done—of the promise with which, buoyed up, Joe Brownlow had gone away—came to her with mighty, terrifying clearness.

"Oh! what have I done, what have I done? Come back! Come back!" Molly cried, starting suddenly to her feet and, tearing her way through bush and undergrowth, she made her way rapidly along the trail which led through the forest.

She ran till she was spent, sick, and very, very tired. But it was no use.

Joe Brownlow had gone; she could not catch him up!

Long after the rest of the house was asleep Molly stood at her window, looking out into the quiet night, listening to the night sounds of the forest, and smelling the deliciously sweet scents which come from the rich, moist earth.

With Jasper Ling, she had found happiness and such peace as she had never, even faintly, dreamed of. Up till now her life in Misty Valley had been almost unbroken calm. Now she might have to leave it all. And for what?

The young girl, in imagination, heard the rush and roar of what she rightly conceived to be the kind of life led in towns and cities, far beyond the quiet forest, the mountains, and the prairie. She heard it as one in a quiet harbour hears outside the rush and roar of an angry, tempestuous sea. She shuddered. The gloom and fear of it all crept into her soul. She was so alone. Her benefactor was kind, and her reverence and love for him was very real and very deep. But youth ever calls to youth, and Molly only saw and longed for one face and the sound of one voice which, she thought, was for ever still.

Only the quiet stars looked down in pity upon the lonely, love-hungry girl as she whispered into the dusky shadows, "Jack, can you hear me where you are, and, understanding all things, do you know that I love you? Do you?"

CHAPTER XXVI

AT the edge of the gloomy forest, about fifteen miles north of Misty Valley, the new copper mine belonging to Jimmy Minton was situated.

A large clearing had been made for the tents and shacks which at present accommodated the miners, and at the doors of most of these, work being over for the day, were groups of men smoking, playing cards, reading or talking, whichever appealed most to them at the moment.

In a large white tent, set a little apart from the others, sat Jack Lorimer, ostensibly poring over some charts spread out on the table before him, but in reality wondering why he had ever allowed himself to be persuaded into accepting the post of under-manager of the new copper mine.

Not that he felt himself incompetent to perform the duties which his new position involved; far from it.

He knew that he was worth every penny of the handsome salary that he was receiving.

But the worn, young face, joyless eyes, and expression of the hopelessness in moments when he was not wholly absorbed in his work told their own eloquent, tragic story.

Jack Lorimer's luck had turned too late! So long as human beings have someone to love and work for they are bound fast to life and all its

myriad interests. But nobody with a large, generous, sensitive soul can long sustain life apart from love.

Jack was popular, and more than popular, with the miners—picked men, most of whom had worked side by side with him in the old days—and not a single man had a harsh word to say against the modest, kindly young manager who had proved himself a hero in the mine as well as on the distant battle-fields of France.

He loved them, worked for them, studied their interests in every possible way, and since he had been on terms of familiarity with Jimmy Minton he had quietly made many suggestions for the better housing, better conditions of work, and many other improvements that were only possible because they came from the very heart of one who had been all his life a toiler and who had plumbed all the pitiful depths of poverty.

Jack Lorimer had accomplished much useful work for his fellow-men during his six months' stay at Log House, and in the future he was destined to be one of Canada's leading employers and richest men and, more than all, one of the best loved men in the whole Dominion.

But, like all who have within them the seeds of true greatness, Jack Lorimer counted his work for others as of little worth, and he was asking himself, as he sat in the tent which he was sharing with his employer for a couple of days, if there was any reason why he should not yield up his post to one of the many men who could quite easily fill it, and to whom it would bring great joy; for it brought him none at all.

"I could go off trapping or something like that; anything with a bit of risk attached to it would do to keep me from this fruitless, eternal longing after my poor girl." And the man for whom the zest of life had departed sank his great splendid head still deeper between his work-hardened hands.

Jimmy Minton, entering the tent, needed no words to tell him what was the matter with the young employé whom he had grown to love—perhaps even better than he would have loved—like a brother.

He knew that it was not anything physical which ailed the big, strong, tender-hearted fellow. He had been down to the uttermost depths of despair himself for a month or more after Molly's reported suicide; but with the Jimmy Mintons of the world if grief does not kill it mercifully wears itself out in time, so that the episode becomes but a melancholy memory.

It was more than this to the young mine-owner, however; he knew that if, by a miracle, Molly could be found to be alive and free all his passion for her would revive, and he would fight the heart-broken man before him in his love-quest, even though he had now become so dear to him.

He knew that Molly was never far from the mind of his one-time rival, although they never spoke her name.

But it went to his heart to see Jack Lorimer's soul laid bare in the sheer, utter hopelessness of his attitude there at the rough deal table.

He crossed the earthen floor swiftly and laid

a pitying, understanding hand on the broad, strong shoulder.

"Don't let yourself think, old fellow. Come out for a ride instead. It's a beautiful night," said the young mine-owner, in a coaxing voice.

A pair of great, blue, agonised eyes looked up into Jimmy Minton's face; the frank, open countenance was the cemetery of all the brightest hopes that a man can conceive of.

"God! I hope I never see another man look like that! How he must care—what a heart the man must have! I loved her, but never as he did—never as he must have done!"

The words repeated themselves over and over again in Jimmy Minton's mind. His love for the man who was by far the finest that had ever yet come into his life deepened and grew a hundredfold.

He then knew that if the miracle regarding Molly could ever be he would not fight Jack Lorimer for her; he would stand aside and yield her up to the better man.

"Come out for a ride, Jack," he repeated, tenderly, using his young employé's Christian name for the first time, being, indeed, unconscious of everything save his love for Jack Lorimer at that moment.

Hitherto, it had been "Lorimer" and "Mr. Minton" between them; but by some subtle means, without the need for being told, the young miner became conscious of the new bond between them.

Taking the hand which Jimmy Minton held out, he gripped it; and after a moment's silence

he ventured to say, "You—you loved her too, didn't you?"

Jimmy Minton looked on the ground for a moment before he replied. Then, looking up into the sorrow-lined, passionate young face, he nodded.

"I did, Jack; but if Death could give her back to Life, I'd stand aside for you. For you, and for no other man on earth," he finished, softly.

A fleeting smile curled like a wraith around his hearer's lips, and both men left the tent together, to stand for a moment watching the miners at their recreations, and perhaps dreaming a little of the future of the mine which was in its early stages.

"If it is a success—and I know that it will be, Jack—we'll need hundreds more men, and perhaps some of those boys who can't settle down in England will come out to help us. There's freedom, grandeur of a natural kind, and health in the life that we'll offer them—those boys who've been swimming in seas of blood for four of the best years of their lives. Out here they'll forget, and make good, and we'll have a fine, flourishing city built around the new mine before many years are gone. And we'll call it Lorimer city," added Jimmy Minton, with a little laugh.

For a moment Jack Lorimer's eyes glowed; modest as he was, he knew that it was he who had fired his young employer to a real, earnest interest in the work to which his grandfather and then his father had devoted their whole lives.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was very late—almost midnight—when Jack Lorimer and his employer eventually started for the ride that had been suggested earlier in the evening.

Neither of the men could sleep; both shared the restlessness which the almost magical beauty of the night induced.

As they saddled their horses and rode through the big, white-faced sorrel, the laughter and the shouting of the camp—some of the miners were still enjoying life in their various ways—followed them.

They left the narrow, moonlit trail and struck into the rough path that the men had made for themselves in the forest.

They saw the stars through the tremulous leaves and swaying branches, and as they rode, every now and then, fantastic shapes appeared and vanished along the way—probably little wild forest creatures that were frightened by the horses' footsteps.

Suddenly Jack Lorimer reined in his horse; he bent forward in his saddle, his face showing white and stern in the cold white light of the moon, and presently his young employer divined the reason.

Jack's quick eyes had discerned two skulking forms hiding behind a rock, and when the moon was augmented by his powerful electric torch, the dark scowling faces of a couple of half-breeds, men who had been taken on at the mine as extra hands, were revealed.

They were reported to have come from Oakham, a town which bore none too good a reputation with the North-West Mounted Police.

Jack had not cared much about engaging them, but since labour was scarce and work plentiful he had not felt justified in turning them away.

"What are you doing, hiding there like a couple of darned skunks? Come out into the open, the pair of you!" And, dismounting, Jack Lorimer faced the men in hiding.

Jimmy Minton had been riding a little in the rear, and the quiet pace of his horse made no sound on the soft carpet of grass.

Thinking that he was alone, the two men rushed at Jack, both together; but suddenly Jimmy Minton reined in his horse, and, quickly taking in the situation, jumped from the saddle, drawing the loaded revolver which he always carried as he did so.

"What are the darky beauties up to, Jack?" he enquired, covering them both, and fixing his gaze sternly upon them.

"I don't know, but if they are not up to something dirty, I'd like to be put wise why they choose to skulk behind rocks at midnight. They were taken on at the mine this morning, along with twenty other Oakham fellows," explained Jack, rapidly and concisely.

"Well, I'm the boss of the mine—you'd better tell me your game, or the pair of you will join your dead darky brothers in no time," and, in order to make his meaning plain, Jimmy Minton went close up to the shivering, terrified creatures and pressed the muzzle of his revolver against the forehead of one.

Both were arrant cowards—brothers, as it turned out—and one of them was the half-breed who had been paid to assist at Molly's mock wedding.

"It doesn't matter if scum like you are shot and cleared out of the path of better men. You'd not be heard here, and the wölves would make short work of you when next winter comes," observed Jimmy Minton, calmly.

He did not in the least mean what he said, for he held all human life sacred, but he had seen his father deal with half-breeds, and he knew their every characteristic by heart.

"A little more of this medicine, and we'll get the truth out of them," he whispered to Jack.

And eventually they did.

The half-breeds chattered wildly, with many frantic, terrified gesticulations, and Jack could only partly gleam their meaning.

But when they had finished, Jimmy Minton turned and rapidly translated their story to Jack.

"The dirty hounds are waiting for the return of a gang who are in their pay—fellows who were taken on at the mine a few days ago—and who have gone to a place called Misty Valley, about fifteen miles from here, to rob the house of a rich

old man who lives there with a young girl—his daughter, I suppose—and a couple of servants. It seems that this precious pair of beauties discovered the place by accident, which is the only house in the valley, and their plan is evidently to lie low and work at the mine until the affair has died down. The low-down scum!" And the young mine-owner once again pressed the cold steel to the light brown temple, thereby eliciting a yell of sheer stark terror.

"We'd better ride on at once; we may be wanted," said Jack, directly he understood.

"Of course," assented Jimmy Minton, immediately.

Turning to the shivering half-breeds, he said, curtly, "Can you ride? Do you know the way to the house from here?"

A dark, woolly head nodded an affirmative.

"Straight to end of trail, an' den to left," was the feargotten reply.

"Here, you two fellows had better get on in front of us, and ride like the devil! Kill the horses if it can't be done any other way, but if we are not there within an hour I'll blow the brains out of the pair of you!" threatened the young mine-owner as he watched the men mount, keeping them covered all the time.

They spurred the poor brutes on through the prickly undergrowth, because it was a nearer way, and, with the half-breeds riding like the wind, because their lives depended upon their speed, Jack and his employer set out on the errand which was to culminate in joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, that strange mixture of events which Fate

weaves into the lives of men and women so that too much sunshine will not scorch the soul, nor too many tears drown the little pearls of pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MOLLY always slept with her window wide open to the winds and the rushing trees, and all the myriad forest sounds that she had known and loved from earliest babyhood.

The moon, shining in white and full upon her fast asleep in bed, revealed a tiny smile on her parted lips and a look of loveliest content on her broad, serene brow.

There were reasons why Molly smiled in her sound, healthy young sleep. She had gone to bed happy, for her benefactor had arrived home, safe and sound, that evening, and with his coming confidence and happiness had returned to the whole household.

Molly had told him of Joe Brownlow's visit and proposal, and the strange story of how she had been deceived by a mock marriage ceremony into believing herself to be Dick Earle's wife.

The old musician was not so much of a dreamer that he failed to be very greatly interested in all that his little friend told him, and he had shrewd suspicions of the man who had resorted to a criminal action in order to deceive a girl about such a thing as marriage.

But he said nothing to Molly, only that night

a long letter, giving fullest details, was written to a famous New York lawyer, and Leo, the faithful old negro servant who would have stood by his master to the last gasp, was sent into Oakham, the nearest township, in order to post it. As it was late when the letter was finished he was bidden to stay overnight at the rough little public-house, and come back early the next day.

Thus, by the merest chance, Jasper Ling deprived himself of the strength that he was so sorely to need two hours after his servant's departure.

A silver moonbeam fell across Molly's pale, exquisite little face, and she turned towards it, smiling, murmuring something in her sleep.

Then an owl left his nest with a great screech, and flew across the moonlit clearing to the deeper gloom of the forest, screeching his loudest as he passed the young girl's open window.

The sound awakened Molly, and immediately she became conscious that something unusual was taking place just down below, for the whole air was a-wing with frightened birds, disturbed from their sleep, and the clearing around the cottage resounded with their startled cries.

Hastily thrusting her little feet into slippers, Molly ran to the window and leaned out as far as she could without overbalancing.

Her young eyes easily pierced the clear blueness of the night, and what she saw made her recoil, sick and faint with fear—not for herself, but for the man who had been so wonderfully kind and good to her, who was, in all probability, fast asleep in his bed, unaware of the danger that

threatened him, that lurked, full of hideous portent, in the forest below.

How had the five burly, drunken, swearing creatures,—some of them half-castes, some of them white—who were laughing and brawling just beneath her window, got to discover the abode of Jasper Ling?

It was a deliberate plot, Molly's quick intuition told her that much, and somehow, she could not tell why, but she thought of Joe Brownlow in connection with it.

Had he given away the hiding-place of the famous singer, who was reputed to be a very rich man, and was this ruffianly mob in his pay?

The thought turned Molly even colder. As a matter of plain fact, the remittance man, who at that moment was working his way across to England on the worst tramp steamer that ever sailed the seas, was responsible for the betrayal of the musician's charming little retreat, though, fortunately for his peace of mind, he was quite unaware of the fact.

"Jasper Ling, the greatest singer of the age, worth a cool million at least, they say, has the cutest little place in Misty Valley you ever saw. Lives all alone, only for some old woman and——" Here the drink-sodden remittance man, who had called in at the Oakham saloon, prior to starting on his long journey, had raised his hat. "The most beautiful girl in the whole wide world—the girl I'm going to marry—is having her voice trained by him," he finished, with the slow, impressive wink of the man who has taken too much liquor.

It happened that nobody was in the bar at the time save the half-caste whose signature appeared on Molly's marriage certificate as a witness.

Unfortunately, it was only too easy to make Joe Brownlow answer all the questions which were put to him as to the exact whereabouts of the house in Misty Valley, and the best and quickest way of reaching it.

The difficulty that the half-caste had was not that of getting accomplices, but of making his choice of the number of out-of-works and loafers with which Oakham abounded.

There were so many risks to be thought of and undertaken that it would never do to tackle the job alone.

But the plan to rob Jasper Ling's house was noised abroad on the very night by the half-caste's drunken confederate, with the result that five, and not two, undertook to help in the dastardly work and to share the proceeds between them.

All had signed on as workers at the Minton mine in order to allay suspicion.

Molly's slender white form was suddenly revealed, leaning out of the upper chamber which was her bedroom, by a glorious flood of silver light, and, happening to glance up, one of the men saw her and immediately gave vent to a half-frenzied, drunken yell which went echoing down the quiet valley, dying away at length in the depths of the forest.

"It's the girl! Come on, boys!" she heard the huge, bearded rough who seemed to be the men's leader yell.

He seemed to inspire his followers, for, reeling and roaring, cursing and laughing, the five men made for the door of the house, and she heard them battering at it with all their brute force, calling upon its master to let them in, and threatening things which turned her heart sick as she listened if he failed to do so.

With fingers that seemed to have been suddenly transformed into boneless strips of inanimate flesh, Molly fumbled with the fastenings of a couple of hastily chosen garments, and it seemed as if centuries passed—centuries which were filled with those horrible, drunken, maddened sounds which came from the men who were trying to batter their way into the house—before she succeeded in getting them on.

It occurred to her to wonder why they did not smash the windows and get in that way, which they could easily have done, instead of battering so persistently at the door and walls.

She soon discovered the reason when, pale and trembling, she descended into the little hall and saw her benefactor, looking as calm and unruffled as if he had been about to give her a singing lesson, in the act of ascending the stairs, a lighted candle in his hand, and an expression of anxiety on his noble features which she knew was for her and not for himself.

"What are these men trying to get in for, Mr. Ling?" asked Molly, compelling herself to speak calmly, so as not to add to the old man's anxiety.

"They may try till the crack of doom, child, but they'll never be able to shatter the steel sheets which protect all the doors and windows

in the house," was the wholly reassuring reply. "The only thing I am sorry for is that Leo happens to be away to-night, and his own revolver being out of repair I lent him mine, thus leaving myself without firearms," said Jasper Ling, vexedly, but at the same time passing a protective arm around the little childish figure, endowing Molly with fresh courage and the feeling that she could, if need be, face death calmly beside this chivalrous noble old man.

But Mrs. Clark, the housekeeper, had no such confidence in her master.

She lay on the sofa in the little dining-room, kicking, screaming, and tearing her scanty grey locks in the wildest throes of hysteria, alternately begging Jasper Ling to kill her rather than let "those wild animals, which they are nothing better, tear her to little bits," and then she would offer him a bulky bag of coins which she said might pacify them and save them all from being slaughtered like sheep.

Molly did her best to calm the shrieking woman, and meanwhile the efforts of the men to gain admission to the house redoubled themselves.

But the thickest steel bullet-proof sheets that could be devised protected the windows and doors, and the bullets which the angry men fired at them only sounded like heavy hailstones pattering on glass.

Suddenly the pattering ceased and dead silence followed. The frantic shouts and general din subsided so abruptly that the quietude was harder to bear than had been the noise.

Molly shivered; her grey eyes grew big with

dread, and she left the sobbing woman on the sofa and crept across the room to Jasper Ling, throwing her slender white arms around him as if she would shield him from harm with her own little body. There was something so deadly and sinister in that sudden silence.

Perhaps the gallant old fellow also felt the effect of that sudden, uncanny cessation of all sound and movement, almost as if the would-be robbers had abandoned their mission and turned fugitive. He quietly placed such weapons as the house afforded within reach of his hand as he took up a position between the door and the window, telling Molly not to be in the least alarmed.

"But I am alarmed, Mr. Ling—I can't help it! Perhaps you don't know the type of man that hangs about saloons, never working if he can help it, and always ready to engage in a business of this kind. I know them, for I've lived amongst them all my life, up till the last eighteen months. They wouldn't in the least mind murdering you if you resisted them," and Molly shuddered, for her young eyes, at a time when other children had only beheld beauty and sweetness, had been forced to gaze upon sights that many a strong man might have turned from in disgust, when drink had turned the men in Gaspard's whisky saloon into very fiends.

As she finished, the deadly silence was broken by a man's voice, which came from the direction of the door. Evidently, from the slightly muffled sound, the mouth of the speaker was pressed against the keyhole, and the thick,

nasal drawl had a slightly whining note in its depths.

"Say, Dad, we don't reckon we are anything but a set o' young devils comin' back from a dance way out at Oakham. We all belong to Mr. Minton's new mine—reckon 'is name's reference enough, ain't it?" the voice of the speaker asked, still with a curious note which, somehow, made Molly uneasy, though the man's words had the effect of reassuring Jasper Ling.

"Perhaps, after all, there is no need for alarm. They may be just harmless young miners with a little too much to drink returning to their camp," he said, greatly relieved.

Molly was about to speak when the thick, rough voice again broke the silence.

"We are sorry we kicked up rough, Dad; but sure, we didn't mean it. There's one of our boys got winged by accident, an' he's bleeding like a pig outside your door. Hadn't you better open up an' let us have some rags an' hot water? He'll be sure gone if yer don't."

As if to back up the speaker's statement a veritable roar, like an animal in direst agony, followed his words.

Jasper Ling sprang to his feet immediately, and made as if to draw aside the steel curtains from the door and windows. But Molly, with one bound, reached his side, and placed a pleading, restraining hand upon his arm so soon as she divined his intention.

"Don't trust them, Mr. Ling, whatever they say. You'll be sorry if you do. That's an old trick of theirs. Haven't I seen them play it

scores of times in Lone Pine Station when they thought it would get them what they wanted? I've seen them get an old man out by those means and then kick him to death, for what he had or what they thought he had."

Molly shuddered as she finished; there was no mistaking the deadly earnestness of her voice. She was looking back over the past, and *she knew!*

"What is the nature of your friend's wound?" asked Jasper Ling, quite kindly, hardly raising his voice at all, since he could make it carry whereever he wished.

A yell from five angry, eager, drunken throats was the response to the question.

"I knew that I was right. There is nobody hurt. It was a trick to get you to open the door," said Molly, quietly enough, but with dread, though she masked it well, on her mobile, marble-white face.

"That pause was to enable them to take counsel together. They are doing it again now," said Molly, as a spell of quiet succeeded the dreadful din.

She was perfectly right. Out under the giant maples and redwoods the drunken, baffled, swearing crew were putting their wits together, so as to force an entrance into the house, which, by reason of its resistance to their utmost efforts, they now supposed to contain vast treasure.

"Seems like ther ain't a shot left between us," said one burly brute, whose giant stature fitted him for better work in the world than that of robbing old men and terrifying young girls.

Then, as he felt in his pocket and drew forth a

small square tin filled with shining little objects, a horrible leering smile disfigured still further an already repulsive mouth.

"Listen, boys. I've got something that'll bring the hull parcel of 'em out quick as blazes ef so be they've no fancy fer bein' blown sky-high," he said, producing a long length of fuse from one pocket and showing the tin of detonators in his other hand.

Possibly, if they had been sober, even that lawless, thieving crew, to whom chivalry was not even a name much less an instinct, might have hesitated before assenting to such a cowardly means of putting an end to the old man and the two helpless women who had dared to deny them their wish to plunder. Perhaps in their furious, muddled state they hardly realised what their companion meant; but, at any rate, five pairs of hands were soon busy laying the fuse, and then, to the three grimly waiting inhabitants of the little house, came the news that turned them sick and faint with horror.

"We are jest going ter give yer three minutes ter make up yer mind, mister, an' ef the door ain't opened by then, yer kin say yer prayers mighty quick, an' those that's with yer, too. There's a fuse laid with enough stuff at the end of it ter blow ten little shows like this 'ere one sky-high. Three minutes from now, mind!"

The thick, harsh voice stopped speaking, and Jasper Ling, Molly, and Mrs. Clark, the housekeeper, looked at one another in horror-struck silence for a moment that seemed to stretch into a year. All felt that it was no trick like the last.

Mrs. Clark, the housekeeper, first broke the silence. Flopping down on her stiff old knees in front of her master she banged her precious bag of coins down on the floor, and begged and besought her master to save their lives and let the villains take what they wanted. "For," as she very truly observed, "riches is no good when you are blowed sky-high."

Molly said nothing, only she seized a heavy iron bar and took up her stand as near to her benefactor as possible. Murder was in her wrathful, seething heart, and her intention to kill, if she could, the first man who tried to harm him was written on every line of the pallid face with the blazing eyes, which hardly seemed to belong to a young girl at all.

"Time's up," yelled the voice outside.

"The door is being opened," replied Jasper Ling, and as he spoke he touched the spring which shot the heavy steel curtain into place, and stood in the open doorway, tall, calm, and majestic, in the bright moonlight.

The appearance of Jasper Ling was greeted with a yell which woke the forest echoes, and immediately the opening was filled with the mad, infuriated, reckless crew.

They knocked the old fellow down before he had time to strike a blow in his own defence, and when Molly saw them trampling upon and brutally kicking the man who had been father, friend, and teacher all in one to her, her surroundings suddenly assumed the colour of the blood which was flowing freely from a wound on the old man's temple.

There was nothing soft, or kind, or gentle, not even feminine—about the young girl as she lifted the iron bar above her head and rushed forward to revenge the unprovoked assault upon her benefactor.

But the blow never fell. The weapon dropped from Molly's hand with a dull, heavy thud, and her pale lips, opening, uttered a hoarse, glad cry.

Down the moonlight avenue of pines and maples which Jasper Ling had made in front of the house came two furiously riding young horsemen. In front of each rider was a man apparently fastened to the beast, for no attempt was made by them to dismount.

At the instant when the men surged through the doorway a couple of revolver shots rang out, and loud yells warned the others that help from some unexpected quarter had come for Jasper Ling and the two women.

"Stand back, you dirty lot of thieving scum, or I'll brain the whole lot of you!" shouted Jimmy Minton, his face deathly white, and his eyes gleaming like polished steel.

Those were the last words that he was ever to utter, or almost the last.

The life that had been spared throughout all the horrors of the war in Europe was given just as freely and nobly in defence of the girl he loved as it would have been given for the Motherland, if the sacrifice had been called for.

Not all of the men had fired their last shot when the ruffianly coward who proposed blowing up the house had stated that such was a fact.

The nearest man to the young mine-owner levelled his weapon at the broad, straight back and fired, with a horrible sound that suggested a snarl and a growl combined.

Then, as he saw the body of his victim fall backwards, he fled, panic-stricken, into the forest, flinging his weapon as far from him as he could.

The others stood their ground for a little longer but they too followed the murderer's example when, with a cry that was like the roar of a mad bull, Jack Lorimer exerted every ounce of his mighty strength and, catching up the heaviest man of the four, raised him above his head as if he had been a little child and then flung him right over the heads of his companions, smiling grimly when his body fell with a dull, sickening thud to the ground.

"Cut us down—let us two go as well!" wailed a voice from under the giant maple to which the two horses, each with a helpless, struggling burden, were tied.

But the three men, who had received drink and money from the two whining half-castes, now bound so securely that all their efforts could not free them, paid no heed to their appealing cries.

They feared the strength of the young giant who could pick up grown men as though they were toys and fling their crushed bodies over the heads of their fellows to the earth.

Molly reeled back against the wall of the dining-room and stared with all her might through the open door, not at the two figures which lay prone and inanimate, a little distance away, but at the

figure of the young man who presently knelt down beside Jimmy Minton and bent over him with a low, pitiful cry.

"It—it isn't Jack! I'm mad—dreaming—delirious! But where is Mr. Ling? Oh, I must find him—they've killed him, I know!"

Little, incoherent sentences framed themselves in Molly's distraught mind; little disconnected thoughts at length resolved themselves into definite need for action.

She hastily tore a tablecloth into strips, and, quite alone, since Mrs. Clark had relapsed into a dead faint, she crossed the threshold, and taking no notice of the other kneeling figure whose back was to her, she bathed her benefactor's temples, washed his wound—which was not very serious, after all—and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes.

"Oh, you are not dead, Mr. Ling! Thank God, thank God!" cried Molly, forgetful for the moment of that other kneeling figure which bore so strange and startling a resemblance to her dead lover.

The whole sordid, sickening episode of the raid upon the house had taken place in the darkness, with only the moon, shining at intervals, for illumination. Steady artificial light, no matter how dim, would have quickly revealed the identity of the young couple to each other.

Jack Lorimer, for his part, had hardly noticed the slender white figure of the young girl in the excitement of dealing with the drunken mob that menaced her safety.

He was bending tenderly over the prostrate form of the man whom he had grown to care for much more deeply than he knew when the voice that sent all the blood pounding madly along his veins fell on his ears.

Badly injured as he was, Jimmy Minton heard it too, and he tried to raise himself into a sitting position as he whispered faintly, "It's—it's Molly, old man. Go to her."

Jack did not yet know the extent of his employer's injuries, and Molly had been reassured as to Jasper Ling's condition.

It was a strange, unearthly meeting, at the dead of night in the lonely forest, with the form of a dying man between them.

But when two young hearts are beating madly to the sweetest, most intoxicating tune that the world knows, there is no room for any other emotion save realisation of one mighty stupendous fact—the fact of their love for one another.

Jack Lorimer's blood was throbbing, leaping, and racing in his veins at the sight of Molly, whose death he had never believed in, even when the evidence seemed to preclude all possibility of the fact that she might yet be alive.

But how much more beautiful, how womanly and tender she had grown since last his passionately loving eyes had beheld her!

"Molly! Little, sweet love!" was all that he could say, in a hoarse whisper, as he crushed the little form to him in the first embrace that Molly had known from the man to whom from the very start her love had been given.

Jack Lorimer, as he held the sweetly yielding

little body in his arms, had completely forgotten the fact that never, by word or sign, had he made Molly aware of his love for her.

For so many weary weeks and months she had been his, in imagination, and when others thought her dead, and when, in his blackest moments, he had almost felt inclined to agree with them, it was always his sweetheart whom he mourned. To such a strong, almost primitively simple nature as his it was absolutely inconceivable that Molly might not return the love that so dominated his entire being.

He had forgotten, and he was rejoicing with all the strength of his manhood, in the fact that he had at last found his mate.

But Molly had not forgotten. Through every fibre of her being the first sweet joy of young love was surging like an impetuous, mighty river, and "He loves me! He loves me!" her glad little heart kept repeating, over and over again.

Jimmy Minton watched them from his half-reclining position on the soft moon-silvered grass, and there was a brave smile in his eyes, but no envy in his heart, for he knew, as surely as if he had been languishing for months, that very soon the call would come for the long, last journey that all men must take, alone.

Oblivion to all else but Love's sweet intoxication only lasted a few seconds. The need of others for the use of their strong young arms soon recalled the lovers to a sense of material things.

"I came along with Mr. Minton, and I fear that he is pretty badly hurt; but he is still conscious, so if you'll prepare a room and get a light

I'll carry him in," said Jack, tenderly lifting his employer as he spoke.

Jasper Ling had somewhat recovered from the cowardly treatment that he had received and had already preceded Molly to the house, where he speedily lit candles and made all preparation for the reception of the young mine-owner, who was, of course, quite well known to him.

They placed him in the best bedroom, and the noble face of the old musician grew very sad as, with skilful hands, he stripped the bruised body and viewed the extent of the injury that had been done to it.

"The dastardly cowards!" he murmured, as he did what he could, knowing all the time that before another sun had set the brave young soul would have passed away.

"No good in making me uncomfortable with all those bandages, sir. There isn't a ghost of a chance, is there? You may as well tell me frankly," whispered Jimmy Minton, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

Jasper Ling knew that he was talking to a man who had faced death too many hundreds of times to squeal now that Fate had overtaken him.

"Dear boy, I wish I could say 'Yes,' but I can't—it wouldn't be kind to do so. Is there anything I can do for you? Mrs. Minton and your cousin shall be fetched at once," said the old fellow, with tears running down his cheeks.

A shade of protest crossed the chalk-white young face as he heard the mention of his aunt and cousin.

"I don't want them to see me like this. Better that they should remember me living."

A spasm of pain seized the dying man, and Jasper Ling gave him a dose of a restorative.

"I—I've not got much longer. But I want to do something urgent—I must do it before—before the end," he said, bravely. "Bring me pen and ink and paper, and if you have anybody who could act as witness, besides yourself, bring them," said the young mine-owner, almost calmly, as the pain ceased and the drug began to do its merciful work.

"Molly, or—or the young man who came with you?" suggested Jasper Ling, quickly and quietly.

"Neither of those. I want to make a fresh will," was the impatient reply.

The older man crossed to the fireplace and rang a bell violently.

Molly, who was downstairs helping to attend to the man whom Jack had lifted and thrown about a dozen yards, came rushing up.

"How is he, Mr. Ling?" she asked, the dread in her heart showing itself in her face and in the tones of her usually low-pitched voice.

Instead of answering Molly's enquiry, Jasper Ling gave two orders in a sharp, incisive voice.

"Tell the young man below to ride as fast as he can to Oakham for a doctor, and to bring the minister as well, if he is at home. Also tell Mrs. Clark that she is to come up to me at once."

Molly obeyed with the feeling that a hand of ice was clutching at her heart, and after locking the leader of the raider's gang in Jasper Ling's

stable, from which it would be a practical impossibility to escape, Jack Lorimer mounted a fresh horse and Molly heard him spurring it on as he took the path which led to the trail and thence to Oakham.

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE were little beads of sweat on poor Jimmy Minton's brow, wrung from him by the agony which the effort to write had cost him. The dark eyes were dull and deeply sunken, but as, his task accomplished, he fell back heavily amongst the pillows, a certain wistful gleam in their depths caused Jasper Ling to bend over him tenderly and ask, "Is there anything else, my dear, dear boy?"

The pale lips moved and framed the word "Molly."

For a time, at least, Molly's benefactor had completely forgotten her existence. Now it suddenly flashed across him that it was the poor boy upon the bed who had first introduced the young girl to him.

"I will fetch her at once," said the old man, rising from the bedside.

Molly was alone in the dining-room, by the fire that Jack had kindled. She had put it into some sort of order, and was now straining her ears to catch the sounds that came from the stables, where three men were locked, helpless prisoners, all of them, the two others, besides the leader of the gang, being the half-breed who had witnessed Molly's mock marriage.

She started up as her benefactor came into the

room, her grey eyes questioning yet full of dread lest she should hear the news that, in her heart, she expected.

"Is—is he . . ." she began.

"He is asking for you. Come, Molly," said Jasper Ling, in the quiet voice of one who has his emotions in rigid control.

"Oh, Father in heaven, save him, save him!"

Molly echoed the prayer in her wildly beating heart over and over again as she noiselessly followed Jasper Ling up to the room in which poor Jimmy Minton lay.

"Molly!"

The word came like the breath from a very tiny, tired child, it was so faint and so pitiful. It brought the hot, stinging tears to the young girl's eyes, but a greater force than her own checked and held them back.

She was in the presence of the great, unspeakable Mystery, the end to all human life, which fills the old with resigned sorrow, but the young with passionate resentment and dread.

"Oh, you are not going to die, Mr. Minton! You must, you shall live!" declared the young girl, taking the limp white hand in her own and holding it warm and tight, as if by so doing she could pour some of her own strength and vitality into the body from which the flame of life was so quickly and surely departing.

But, even as she spoke, Molly's intuition told her the truth.

She looked older, but so sweet and womanly, so infinitely tender, as she bent over the dying man that Jasper Ling, suddenly feeling that solitude

was more fitting than his presence with these two young souls, slipped quietly away, taking up his position outside so as to be within reach of Molly's voice.

"It's . . . so dark . . . bring the light, Molly."

Molly placed the opal-shaded lamp on a small table by the bed, and the white face gleamed hard beneath the yellow light.

"One kiss, Molly—Jack won't mind—he'll have you always," said Jimmy, as a spasm of pain passed away, leaving his breathing easier, and relaxing the tense muscles so that the little bird of hope fluttered joyous wings in Molly's young, untutored heart.

It was the spurious brightness that generally precedes the end, just as a candle will burn its brightest just before the wick flickers out for good.

Molly knelt by the side of the big, old-fashioned bed and kissed the hands, the lips, and the forehead of the man who had so little time to live.

"You'll get better—I know you will!" she whispered, full of confidence.

The sleek, dark head moved slightly.

"No, little girl. But you'll marry Jack and be happy, and it's something to know that—that a good chap will be looking after you."

Molly did not reply; she could not. Her overcharged heart seemed bursting with love and longing, sorrow and regret, and an infinite passionate pity for the young life which was so soon to end, if appearances counted for all.

But Molly knew how deceptive appearances often were; she had seen men badly hurt, for whom there seemed absolutely no hope, make the most marvellous recoveries.

The door handle turned. Jasper Ling, accompanied by the doctor and Jack Lorimer, entered the sick-room.

Jack had not needed to go far on the road to Oakham when he overtook the doctor, who was returning from a case beyond Misty Valley.

The surgeon's examination was mercifully brief; his skilled eye had taken in the signs directly he entered the room.

He shook his head sadly as he met the questioning glances which were directed so anxiously towards him; he, too, knew and liked the young mine-owner.

"I'll give him an injection to ease him off," he said in a low tone to Jasper Ling, opening his little case and taking the needle from it, in order to inject the morphia.

He thought that the sick man was past understanding his words.

But Jimmy Minton, with sudden, inexplicable energy, called out in a loud, clear voice which rang through the tragically quiet room, "No, doctor, I'll go out without being doped. I—I want Molly—only Molly!"

Understanding, the doctor motioned to the others, who silently left the room.

"Stay here beside him," he whispered to Molly, who went at once and knelt by the bed.

Outside in the corridor Jack Lorimer waited, along with Jasper Ling, and the pair of them

were hoping against hope itself, praying with all the forces of their being, that the doctor who was on the other side of the door would be able to save the life of the man who was so dear to both.

And clear through the deadly stillness there came the sound of a young girl's voice repeating the words of the Lord's Prayer :

". . . Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

CHAPTER XXX

IT was the afternoon of the young mine-owner's funeral, and practically the whole town had ceased work for the day as a mark of respect to the biggest and best loved employer in the district.

The brave young body had been laid to rest an hour ago, but still the gloomy hush, inseparable from death, hung over the streets and houses.

It hung, too, over the occupants of the library at Log House, which, by the lawyer's request, included Jack Lorimer and Molly Osborne.

Neither of them could quite understand why they, friends certainly, but not relatives, had been asked to join a party which consisted entirely of the dead man's intimate family circle.

Audrey Minton, hurriedly recalled from Ottawa, was in magnificently expensive mourning, and she stared curiously and not a little resentfully at Molly, who was looking entrancingly beautiful in the simple black frock which she had, with the help of Mrs. Clark, made for herself.

Grace Minton, pale as a lily in her elegant mourning, was evidently keeping a strong hold upon herself, and once or twice her eyelids quivered and her lips trembled when she directed her gaze to the grave, silent young couple who were sitting a little apart from the others.

She, too, wondered why they were there.

But they were all soon to know.

Rising from his seat at the library table, the lawyer cleared his throat and made an announcement which electrified his listeners.

"The principal bequests of my late client are made to his aunt, Mrs. Audrey Minton, also to his cousin, Miss Grace Minton, who each receive the sum of fifteen thousand pounds."

There followed a significant pause, and the air became electric with expectation and suspense. There were several strained faces turned towards the tall, impassive lawyer as he continued, with a calm deliberation which to some was intensely annoying, "The Log House and its entire contents, together with the Mintonville mines and the sum of twenty thousand pounds, is left to John Lorimer, on condition that he and Miss Molly Osborne are married within six months from the date of the bequest."

Rage, consternation, and open hostility was expressed on every face in that quiet, well-ordered room, with the exception of the lawyer, who, with a kindly smile, left his place at the head of the long table and came over to the astonished young couple with outstretched hand.

"Permit me to congratulate you, Mr. Lorimer, on your good fortune, which, if I may be allowed to say so, is thoroughly well deserved," he said, in clear tones which were heard all over the silent room.

Audrey Minton was the first to recover from the sensational announcement.

"This bequest is utterly, absolutely absurd, and

I will appeal to the law to have it set aside," she said, in rasping, vindictive tones, letting a contemptuous glance travel over the two young people who were still in the first throes of bewildered astonishment.

"This—this man," a slender, bejewelled finger was pointed at Jack Lorimer, "was only a miner in my nephew's employ," she said, stormily.

The lawyer's quiet, incisive tones cut across the angry woman's words.

"But, if you recollect, he rose by sheer merit from his humble position to that of under-manager of the new copper mine," he said.

Not heeding his words, Audrey Minton went on, showing the ugly feline side of her nature by attacking Molly, who sat, white as a snowdrift, by her lover's side, not knowing what to make of the unseemly scene which was taking place in the dead man's house on the very day of his funeral.

"As for this young person, she has behaved most abominably. In fact, she was picked up in the street by my poor misguided nephew," she almost shouted, having by now completely lost control of herself.

There was contempt as well as aversion in the lawyer's cold, quiet tones as he said, "This is not the place nor the time for personal quarrels, Mrs. Minton; but if it will interest you in the least, I may say that Mr. Minton's opinion of his former employé was a justly high one. In my hearing he has said over and over again that it is men like Mr. Lorimer who are needed to shape Canada's future, and make her, not an off-spring of a noble country, but a nation that will rank

high with other great nations and fulfil the destiny for which it was created."

Audrey Minton's reply sounded indescribably petty and flat after the lawyer's impressive words.

She merely reiterated, "I shall appeal to the law."

Then even the lawyer became a little heated, and his manner showed it.

"I should strongly advise you to do nothing of the kind, Mrs. Minton, unless you want to take up litigation as a pastime. The will is quite in order, and the doctor who was present at your unfortunate nephew's death-bed is willing to certify that he was sane to the very end. I repeat, that if you go to law you will only lose your money."

A few other bequests were then read out, and the company broke up, to discuss the amazing last-hour will in all its bearings on their homeward journey.

"Grace, please have my things and also your own packed at once. We will go back to Ottawa, late as is the hour, and leave the home which has been stolen—yes, I repeat the word, stolen," and the woman's voice almost broke with the tears which vindictive anger had forced into her eyes, "from us both," she finished, hurling her words at Jack Lorimer, who stood, along with Molly, grim-eyed and stern-lipped, in the now deserted library.

Audrey Minton was sweeping out of the room when she was called back peremptorily.

"Please listen to me a minute, Mrs. Minton,"

he said, quietly, but with a certain subtle "something"—that quality which defies adequate explanation, but which only belongs to born leaders of men—in his keen, commanding young voice, which compelled Audrey Minton to obey.

"Well?" she snapped, facing him, with her hand on the door-knob.

"I have no wish to take from you and your daughter the house which has been your home for so many years," said Jack Lorimer, quietly and kindly—far more kindly than the jealous, greedy woman, who had received a very generous legacy, deserved.

"I offer you back the Log House for as long as you live, and neither I nor my future wife"—Jack turned a proud, loving glance upon Molly—"will ever enter it without your invitation," he finished.

"Can I sell it?" quickly enquired Audrey Minton, with an avaricious gleam in her eyes.

Jack Lorimer's voice betrayed the contempt which he felt as he replied, "If you had not been left an ample fortune, Mrs. Minton, I would say 'Yes' immediately. But my only motive in making the offer was because I thought you might value and love all these beautiful things, and this spacious house. As you quite evidently don't, I withdraw my offer."

The tall, broad-shouldered young figure, so splendidly virile and alive in every way, seemed, to the woman's distorted imagination, to be mocking at her.

"Upstart!" she flung out at the young couple

as she opened the door and disappeared into the passage, banging it loudly after her.

Grace Minton rose, a little wearily, from her seat in the shadow of a huge bookcase, and came towards Jack and Molly, a tiny smile on her lips.

"I am sorry—sorry and ashamed—that mother has taken things like that, because poor Jimmy was not bound to leave us anything at all," she said, in a quiet, wistful voice. "I do not know anybody who is better fitted to carry on than you, Mr. Lorimer. Will you let me wish you both luck and every happiness?" the young girl asked, putting out her hand, which was readily taken by both her listeners.

"I suppose that we shall go to England; it has long been mother's wish to settle down in London, where she was born. I shall become a nurse, I think. It is splendid work, and doing it one can forget so many things," finished Grace Minton.

There was a meaning underlying her words which was understood by both Jack and Molly, and the hearts of the happy lovers went out in pity to the girl whom neither could help, since she wanted, to make her happy, the one thing which never could be hers.

"Mother will be waiting for me, and the journey is a long one. Good-bye, once more," and Grace Minton went out of the room and out of the lives of the young couple whose love story had been so strange, and, in parts, so infinitely sad.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE night air was stealing the scent from the lilies in Jasper Ling's wonderful garden, and Molly was seated in the little arbour, which had once served her for a bedroom, in the dark, rapidly fading days when she had believed Jack to be dead.

In her hand was a letter which old Leo had brought from the Post Office that afternoon.

Molly had read and reread it until she knew every word by heart. She was longing impatiently for Jack, who was presently coming to see her, for every moment of the day was taken up in learning the duties of his new, heavily responsible position.

He had pleaded for an immediate marriage, but Molly had put him off, saying that she wanted to have the sweetness of anticipation for at least three months before her wedding day.

"Very well, little rose of the world. Dream your white, beautiful dreams for three months, but not any longer, mind—not a day longer," Jack said, fondly, as he acquiesced to his sweetheart's wish.

Because he needed every ounce of his strength and energy just then, Molly, acting on the advice of Jasper Ling, had not told him of her mock marriage with Dick Earle and Joe Brownlow's

subsequent proposal and journey all the way to England on her behalf. It was so essential that the new master of the Mintonville mines should be free from anxiety and worry for at least a month.

"You may hear from this man Brownlow, who does not seem to be altogether unworthy, in the meantime, and anyway, the whole matter is in the hands of my lawyers, who are having all enquiries made in England," said Molly's benefactor, kindly.

It was a great artistic grief to him that the world was losing so sweet a singer as Molly, but he agreed with his young pupil when she said, with the simplicity which formed so large a part of her character, "My voice and your training will not be wasted, Mr. Ling, for out here in the new little towns and cities which are everywhere springing up there are none of the elegancies and attractions of the cities that have taken hundreds of years to bring to perfection, and it may be that my voice will be of more use in Canada than in London or New York."

Jasper Ling was visibly touched and profoundly moved by the very obvious truth of Molly's remark.

He was glad, too, that he would not lose the sweet little friend who had come into his life so strangely.

Molly's brows were still knitted over her letter when Jack came striding impatiently along the garden path, eager to hold his sweetheart in arms that had been hungry for the feel of her all day, longing to press the lips that were so soft

and warm, and so infinitely sweet, with his own.

"The letter can wait, beloved, but we can't," said the young, ardent lover, crushing the soft, yielding form to his breast.

"But—oh, do listen, dear! It is an important letter, one that affects my whole life, and tells me why Dick Earle was so anxious for me to marry him," said Molly, earnestly, as she disengaged herself from her lover's embrace and sat down on the arbour seat.

"By heaven, I'll not wait for the law, the dirty, sneaking, cowardly hound! I'll pound his whole dashed carcase into jelly!" shouted Jack, furiously, when he had read and grasped the contents of Molly's letter.

It was from Joe Brownlow, who, on arriving in England, had no difficulty whatever in tracing Dick Earle, who had just succeeded in establishing his claim, as Molly's husband and next-of-kin, to the huge fortune that had been left to her mother, and, failing her, her child by James Osborne, or her next of kin, supposing her to be dead.

"This explains the urgency of Earle's desire for the marriage to take place, dear little Molly, but it places you for a long time out of my reach, for I could not live on my wife; I have not yet sunk to that. I have, however, decided to come straight back to Oakham to give myself up for my share in the ceremony that nearly robbed you of your rights, as I am advised by my lawyer that this is the best thing to do. Private detectives are watching Earle, who has not been advised of my

arrival in England, for forewarned is forearmed, and there is a saying that dead men tell no tales, which you may have heard. He is enjoying himself hugely on your money, and has not married again.

"I have borrowed sufficient to come over on a fast steamer, and you may expect me at Misty Valley a day or two after the arrival of this letter.

"Molly, if I do all that I can to retrieve the past, will you give me a chance?"

It was the sentence preceding the last that chained Jack Lorimer's attention and caused him to exclaim, as he read the name of the steamer on which Joe Brownlow was a passenger: "The *Firefly* is due this very night, a day or two earlier, owing to good weather. I'll go down to meet it, darling, and if this fellow Brownlow is not on it, I'll throw up everything here and go to London to make my mark on that skunk before the law gets him!"

"But you don't know Mr. Brownlow, darling. Hadn't I better come with you?" asked Molly, who was not at all anxious for Jack to get himself mixed up in what seemed to be a case purely for the law, yet, woman-like, she thrilled to the thought that her lover was willing to fight for her sake.

"Yes, you can come, but there is not much time, little love," said Jack Lorimer, who had already asked Leo to saddle him the fastest horse in his master's stable.

"I can be ready in twenty minutes," replied Molly, quietly, and within that time she was

dressed and seated on the horse that was to carry her along the trail to Oakham by her lover's side.

. . . . .

The dim church in the busy London square was thronged with eager spectators of the most romantic wedding that had taken place for more years than the majority of the women who were present cared to remember.

"The Bartered Bride" was the title that the Press gave to Molly Osborne, on account of the shameful bargain that her stepfather, who had been subpœnaed all the way from Lone Pine Station to give evidence, had made with Dick Earle, who, not for the first time in his life, stood in a prison dock.

His method of obtaining the money which belonged to Molly was clever in the extreme, but he had not reckoned with the unknown element of Chance—no criminal ever does.

Joe Brownlow first set the legal ball rolling by his confession, in which he was backed up by the terrified half-breed, who, still in custody for his share in the raid on Jasper Ling's house, which had led to Jimmy Minton's death, was only too ready to give all the help possible, in the hope that it would have some bearing upon his sentence.

By a coincidence the death sentence upon the man who had murdered Jimmy Minton and the sentence of seven years' penal servitude upon Dick Earle were passed on the same day. Joe Brownlow, owing to a variety of extenuating circumstances, was let off, and it was Molly who

started him on the path which led to his eventual happiness, by putting the administration of a fund for the benefit of soldiers' orphans, which consisted of half her fortune, entirely into his hands.

"And now, with the shadows behind us, and the sunshine in our faces, what about getting married before we return to Canada, sweetheart?" said Jack, tenderly, when the whole wretched legal business was ended.

"If—if you like, Jack," Molly replied, hiding her burning little face on his breast.

"We'll keep it as quiet as possible. We have had enough publicity to last us all our lives," said Jack, earnestly, who had hated having his slightest doing recorded in the newspapers and his photograph taken on any and every possible occasion.

But it had leaked out, the news that they desired so ardently to keep to themselves, and the church was crowded with eager well-wishers, and those who could not find accommodation in the church lined the streets and crowded round the gates that led to the porch.

"Here she is! Oh, isn't she lovely! Good luck, long life, and happiness! God bless you!"

These were the excited, happy good wishes that greeted the arrival of the lovely young bride, who was to be given away by the famous American singer, Mr. Jasper Ling.

Molly's face was marble-white beneath her pearl-encrusted veil, but her grey eyes were wide and starry bright with tears of happiness that seemed to bring heaven very near to earth.

She passed down the long, dim aisle to the altar,

where her bridegroom, who had fought and waited and loved so deeply through the long, dark days, was waiting to take her hand in the holy sacrament that would bind and make them for ever one.

THE END

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